Marcel Ray Duriez

Nevaeh

Book: 27

French Kiss

Part: 7

Kiss me Here

It’s funny to see a boy other than Josh in our kitchen. I feel nervous for some reason.

‘How long is it going to take?’ he asks me, his hands in his pockets.

‘Hours, probably.’ I pick up the measuring cup again. I cannot remember what cup I was on.

Marcel groans. ‘Why can’t we just go to the store and buy some?’

I start measuring the flour that is in the bowl, separating it into piles.

‘Because do you think any of the other moms are buying cupcakes from Food Lion? How would that make Kitty look?’

‘Well, if it’s for Kitty, then Kitty should be helping.’ Marcel hops off the stool and comes up to me and slides his hands around my waist and tries to untie my apron strings.

‘Where is the kid?’

I stare at him. ‘What - are you doing?’

Marcel looks at me like I am a dummy. ‘I need an apron too if I’m going to help. I’m not trying to get my clothes all messed up.’

‘We’re not going to be done in time for the game,’ I tell him.

‘Then we’ll just go to the party after.’ Marcel shoots me an incredulous look. ‘That was in the note I wrote to you today! God, why do I even bother?’

‘I was really busy today,’ I say meekly. I feel bad. He is following through on his end of the deal and faithfully writing me a note a day and I cannot even be bothered to read them. ‘I don’t know if I can go to a party. I don’t know if I’m allowed to go out that late.’

‘Is your dad home? I’ll ask him.’

‘No, he’s at the hospital. Besides, I can’t just leave Kitty here by herself.’ I pick up the measuring cup again.

‘Well, what time does he get home?’

‘I don’t know. Maybe late.’ Or like in the next hour. But Marcel will be long gone by then. ‘You should just go. I don’t want to hold you up.’

Marcel groans. ‘Covey. I need you. Gen has not said a word about us yet, which is kind of the whole point of this. And - she might bring that dick-hole she’s dating.’

Marcel pushes out his lower lip. ‘Come on. I came through for you with Josh, didn’t I?’

‘Yes,’ I admit. ‘But, Marcel, I have to make these cupcakes for the bake sale-’

Marcel stretches his arms out. ‘Then I’ll help you. Just give me an apron.’

I back away from him and start rummaging around for another apron. I find one with a cupcake print and hand it to him.

He makes a face and points at mine. ‘I want the one you’re wearing.’

‘But it’s mine!’ It is red-and-white gingham with little brown bears; my grandma got it for me in Korea. ‘I always bake in this. Just wear that one.’

Slowly Marcel shakes his head and holds out his hand. ‘Give me yours. You owe me for not reading any of my notes.’

I untie the apron and hand it over. I turn around and go back to my measuring. ‘You’re a bigger baby than Kitty.’

‘Just hurry up and give me a task.’

‘Are you qualified, though? Because I only have exactly enough ingredients for six dozen cupcakes. I don’t want to have to start over-.’

‘I know how to bake!’

‘Okay, then. Dump those sticks of butter into the mixing bowl.’

‘And then?’

‘And then when you’re done, I’ll give you your next task.’

Marcel rolls his eyes, but he does as he is told. ‘So-o this is what you do on Friday nights?

Stay home and bake in your PJ's?'

'I do other stuff too,' I say, tying my hair into a tighter ponytail.

'Like?'

I am still so flustered by Marcel's sudden appearance that I cannot think.

'Um, I go out.'

'Where?'

'God, I don't know! Quit interrogating me, Marcel.' I blow my

bangs out of my eyes. It is getting warm here. I might as well just turn off the oven, because. Marcel's arrival has slowed down this entire process. At this rate, I will be up all night. 'You made me lose my count on the flour. I'm going to have to start over from scratch!'

'Here, let me do it,' Marcel says, coming up close behind me.

I jerk away from him. 'No- no, I'll do it,' I say, and he shakes his head and tries to take the measuring cup from me, but I will not let go, and flour

poufs out of the cup and into the air. It dusts us both. Marcel starts cracking up and I let out an outraged shriek. ‘Marcel!’

He is laughing too hard to speak.

I cross my arms… ‘I’d better still have enough flour.’ ‘You look like a grandma,’ he says, still laughing.

‘Well, you look like a grandpa,’ I counter. I dump the flour in my mixing bowl back into the flour canister.

‘Actually, you’re a lot like my granny,’ Marcel says. ‘You hate cussing. You like to bake. You stay at home on Friday nights. Wow, I’m dating my granny… gross.’

I start measuring again. One, two. ‘I don’t stay home every Friday night.’ Three…

‘I’ve never seen you out. You do not go to parties. We used to hang out back in the day.

Why’d you stop hanging out?’

Four. ‘I - I don’t know. Middle school was different.’ What does he want me to say?

That Genevieve decided I was not cool enough- so I got left behind? Why is he so clueless?

‘I always wondered why you stopped hanging out with us.’

Was I on five or six? ‘Marcel! You made me lose my count again!’

‘I have that effect on women.’

I roll my eyes at him, and he grins back at me, but before he can say

anything else, I yell, ‘Kitty! Get down here!’

‘I’m working-’

‘Marcel’s here!’ I know that will get her.

In five seconds flat, Kitty’s running into the kitchen. She skids to a stop, suddenly shy. ‘Why are you here?’ she asks him.

‘To pick up Lara Jean. Why aren’t you helping?’

‘I was running an experiment. Want to help me?’

I answer for him. ‘Sure, he’ll help you.’ To Marcel, I say, ‘You’re distracting me. Go help Kitty.’

‘I don’t know if you want my help, Katherine. See, I am distracting to women. I make them lose their count.’ Marcel winks at her and I make a gagging sound. ‘Why don’t you stay down here and help us bake?’

‘Boring!’ Kitty turns tail and runs back up the stairs.

‘Don’t you dare try to sprinkle or frost when it’s all over!’ I yell. ‘You haven’t earned the right!’

I am creaming the butter and Marcel's cracking eggs into a chipped salad bowl when my dad gets home. 'Whose car is that out front?' Daddy asks as he walks into the kitchen.

He stops short. 'Hello,' he says, surprised. He has a Chan's Chinese Bistro bag in his hands.

'Hey, Daddy,' I say like it is perfectly normal that Marcel - is cooking in our kitchen. 'You look tired.'

Marcel stands up straighter. 'Hi, Dr. Covey.'

My dad sets the bag down on the kitchen table. ‘Oh, hello,’ he says, clearing his throat. ‘Nice to see you. You’re Marcel K., right?’

‘Right.’

‘One of the old gangs,’ my dad says jovially, and I cringe. ‘What are you kids up to tonight?’

‘I’m baking cupcakes for Kitty’s PTA bake sale and Marcel’s helping,’ I say.

My dad nods. ‘Are you hungry, Marcel? I have plenty.’ He lifts the bag.

‘Shrimp lo mein, kung pao chicken.’

‘Actually, Lara Jean and I were going to stop by our friend’s party,’ Marcel says. ‘If that would be, okay? I’ll bring her back early.’

Before my dad can answer, I say to Marcel, ‘I told you I have to finish these cupcakes.’

‘Kitty and I will finish them,’ my dad interjects. ‘You two go to that birthday party.’

My stomach flips. ‘It’s okay, Daddy. I have to be the one to do them; I’m decorating them specially.’

‘Kitty and I will figure it out. You can get changed. We’ll keep working on these cupcakes.’

I open and close my mouth like some trout. ‘All right, then.’ And I do not make a move, I just stand there, because I am afraid to leave the two of them alone together.

Marcel smiles at me broadly. ‘You heard the man. We’ve got this covered.’

I think, do not act too confident, because then my dad will think you are arrogant.

There are certain outfits you have that make you feel good every time you wear them, and then there are outfits where you wore them too many times in a row because you- liked them so much, and now they just feel like garbage. I am looking at my closet now and everything looks like garbage. My anxiety is only compounded by the fact that I know- Gen will be wearing the

exact right thing because she always wears the exact right thing.

And I must be wearing the right thing too. Marcel would not have come by and made such a point of going to this party if it were not important to him.

I pull on my jeans and try on different tops- a frilly peach one that suddenly looks prissy in my eyes, a long fuzzy sweater with a penguin on it that looks too kid-sh. I am stepping into a pair of gray shorts with black suspenders when someone knocks at

my door. I freeze and grab a sweater to cover myself up.

‘Lara Jean?’ It is Marcel.

‘Yes?’

‘Are you almost ready?’

‘Almost! Just- just go downstairs. I’ll be down soon.’

He lets out an audible sigh. ‘Okay. I’m going to see what the kid’s doing.’

When I hear his footsteps walking away, I scramble and try a

cream polka dot blouse with the shorts-suspenders ensemble. It is cute, but is it too cute? Too much?

And should I do black tights or black knee socks? Margot said I look Parisian in this outfit. Parisian is a good thing. It is sophisticated, romantic. I try on a beret, just to see the effect, and I immediately throw it off. Too much.

I wish Marcel had not snuck up on me with this. I need time to plan, to prepare. Though truthfully, if he had asked me ahead of time, I would have produced an excuse not to go. It is one

thing to go to Tart and Tangy after school, but a party with all of Marcel's friends, not to mention Genevieve?

I hop around my room, searching for my over-the-knee socks, then searching for my strawberry lip pot that looks like a strawberry. Gosh, I need to clean my room. It is hard to find anything in this mess.

I run to Margot's room for her big grandpa cardigan, and I pass Kitty's open door, where I see Marcel and Kitty lying on the floor, working with her lab set. I root through Margot's

sweater drawer, which is now T-shirts and shorts because she has taken most of her sweaters. No grandpa cardigan. But at the bottom of the drawer, there is an envelope.

A letter, from Josh.

I want to open it so badly. I know I should not.

Carefully, ever so carefully, I take out the letter and unfold it.

Dear Margot, you say we had to break up because you do not want to go to college with a boyfriend, and you

want your freedom, and you do not want to be held back. But you know, and I know that is not the real reason. You broke up with me because we had sex and you feared getting close to me.

I stop reading.

I cannot believe it. Chris was right- and I was wrong. Margot and Josh did have sex. It is like everything I thought I knew is the opposite. I thought I knew exactly who my sister was, but it turns out I do not know anything.

I hear Marcel calling my name. ‘Lara Jean! Are you ready yet?’

Hastily I fold the letter up and put it back in the envelope. I put it back in the drawer and slam the drawer shut. ‘Coming!’

WE’RE STANDING AT THE FRONT door of Steve Bledell’s mansion.

Steve’s on the football team; he is mostly known for having a rich stepdad with his plane.

‘Ready?’ Marcel asks me.

I wipe my palms on my shorts. I wish I had had time to do something better for my hair.

‘Not really.’

‘Then let us talk strategy for a second. All you must do is act like you are in love with me. That shouldn’t be too hard.’

I roll my eyes. ‘You’re the vainest boy I’ve ever met.’

Marcel grins and shrugs. He has his hand on the doorknob, but then he stops. ‘Hold on,’ he says, and he

pulls the hair tie out of my hair and tosses it into the yard.

‘Hey!’

‘It looks better down. Just trust me.’ Marcel runs his fingers through my hair and fluffs it up, and I swat his hand away. Then he takes his phone out of his back pocket and he snaps a picture of me.

I give him a puzzled look, and he explains, ‘In case Gen checks my phone.’

I watch as he sets the picture as his wallpaper.

‘Can we do another one?’ I do not like the way my hair looks.

‘Nah, I like it. You look pretty.’ He only said it so we could hurry up and go inside, but it makes me feel good.

Walking into this party with Marcel -, I cannot help but feel a sudden rush of pride.

He is here with me. Or is it that I am here with him?

I see her as soon as we walk in- she is on the couch with her girls; they are all drinking from red Solo cups. No boyfriend in sight. She raises her eyebrows at me and whispers something to Emily Nussbaum. ‘Heyyy, Lara Jean,’ Emily calls out, crooking her finger at me. ‘Come sit by us.’

I start to walk toward them, thinking Marcel is next to me, but he is not. He is stopped to say hi to someone. I look at him with panicky eyes and he just gestures at me to keep going. He mouths, You are up.

Crossing the room alone wants to cross a continent, with Gen and her friends watching me. ‘Hi, guys,’ I say, and my voice comes out high-pitched and little-girlish.

There is no room for me on the couch, so I perch on an armrest like a bird on a telephone wire. I keep my eyes trained on Marcel’s back; he is across the room with some guys from the lacrosse team. It must be nice to be him. So-o at ease, so comfortable with himself, knowing that people are waiting for him, like Marcel’s here, now

the party can get started. I look around the room, just to have something to do, and see Gabe and Darrell, and they wave at me very nicely, but they do not come over. It feels like everyone is waiting and watching, waiting, and watching to see what Genevieve will do.

I wish I had not come.

Emily leans forward. ‘We’re all dying to know - what’s the story with you and-?’

I know she has been commissioned by Gen to ask. Gen’s

sipping her drink, casual as can be, but she is waiting for my answer. Is she drunk yet? I wonder. From everything I have heard and know about Gen, she is a mean drunk. Not that I have ever personally experienced it, but I have heard things. There are stories.

I wet my lips. ‘Whatever Marcel said - I guess that’s the story.’

Emily waves this off like whatever Marcel says doesn’t count. ‘We want to hear it from you. I mean, it is just so surprising. How did this even

happen?’ She leans closer like we are girlfriends.

When I hesitate, when my eyes dart toward Genevieve, she smiles and rolls her eyes.

‘It’s okay, you can say, Lara Jean. Marcel and I are over. I don’t know if he told you this, but I’m the one who broke up with him, so.’

I nod… ‘That’s what he said.’ That is not what he said, but it is what I already knew.

‘So- when did you guys get together?’ She tries to sound offhand, but I know my answer is important to her. She’s trying to catch me in something.

‘Pretty recently,’ I say.

‘How recently?’ she presses.

I swallow… ‘Right before school started,’ I tell her. Isn’t that what Marcel and I decided the story was going to be?

Genevieve’s eyes go bright and my heart sinks. I have said the wrong

thing, but it is too late. It’s hard not to get caught up in her spell. She’s the kind of person you want to like you. You know she can be cruel; you have seen her be cruel. But when her eyes are on you, and she’s paying attention to you, you want it to last. Her beauty is part of it, but there is something more- something that draws you in. It is her transparency- everything she thinks or feels is written all over her face, and even if it were not, she would say it anyway, because she says what she thinks, without thinking first.

I can see why Marcel has loved her for so long.

'I think it's adorable,' Genevieve says, and then the girls start talking about some concert they are trying to get tickets for, and I just sit there, glad I do not have to talk- anymore, wondering how it is going with the cupcakes back at home. I hope Daddy isn't overbaking them. There is nothing worse than a dry cupcake.

The girls move on to talking about Halloween costumes, so I get up and go to the bathroom.

I come back to find Marcel sitting in a wingback leather armchair, drinking a beer, and talking to Gabe. There is nowhere for me to sit; my spot on the couch has been taken.

Now what?

I stand there for a second and then I go for it: I do what a girl in love with Marcel would do. I do what Genevieve would do. I march right in and plop down in his lap like it is my rightful place.

Marcel yelps in surprise. ‘Hey,’ he says, coughing on his beer.

‘Hey,’ I say. Then I tweak him once on the nose like I saw a girl do in a black-and-white movie.

Marcel shifts in his seat and gives me a look like he is trying not to laugh, and I get nervous- tweaking a boy on the nose is romantic, right? Then, out of the- corner of my- eye, I see Genevieve glaring at us. She whispers something to Emily and stalks out of the room.

Success!

Later I am pouring myself Cherry Coke and I see Genevieve and

Marcel, talking in the kitchen. She's speaking to him in a low, urgent voice, and she reaches out and touches his arm. He tries to brush her hand away, but she doesn't let go.

I am so mesmerized I do not even notice when Lucas Krapf comes up to me, popping the cap off a bottle of Bud Light. 'Hey, Lara Jean.'

'Hi!' I am relieved to see a familiar face.

He stands next to me, our backs against the dining room wall. 'What are they fighting about?'

‘Who even knows?’ I speak. I smile a secret smile. Hopefully, it is about me, and Marcel will be happy our plan is finally working.

Lucas crooks his finger at me, so I will come closer. He whispers, ‘Fighting isn’t a good sign, Lara Jean. It means you still care.’ His breath smells like beer.

Hmm. Genevieve still cares. Marcel must too.

Lucas pats me on the head fondly. ‘Just be careful.’

‘Thank you,’ I say.

Marcel stalks out of the kitchen and says, ‘Are you ready to go?’ He doesn’t wait for me to answer him; he just starts walking, his shoulders stiff.

I give Lucas a shrug. ‘See you on Monday, Lucas!’ Then I scurry after Marcel.

He is still mad; I can tell he jerks the keys into the ignition. ‘God, she makes me crazy!’ He is so keyed up energy is vibrating off him in waves.

‘What did you say to her?’

I shift uncomfortably in my seat. ‘She asked me when we got together. I told her just before school started.’

Marcel does a full-body groan. ‘We hooked up that first weekend.’

‘But - you guys have broken up already.’

‘Yeah, well.’ Marcel shrugs. ‘Whatever. What’s done is done.’

Relieved, I click on my seat belt and kick my shoes off. ‘What were you two fighting about tonight, anyway?’

‘Don’t worry about it. You did an excellent job. She’s so jealous it’s killing her.’

‘Yay,’ I say. Just if she doesn’t kill me.

We drive through the night in silence. Then I ask, ‘Marcel - how did you know you loved Genevieve?’

‘God, Lara Jean. Why do you have to ask those kinds of questions?’

‘Because I’m a naturally curious person.’ I flip down his mirror and start braiding the top of my hair.

‘And the question you should be asking yourself is, why are you so afraid to answer those kinds of questions?’

‘I’m not afraid!’

‘Then why won’t you answer the question?’

Marcel goes silent, and I’m fairly sure he’s not going to answer, but then, after a long pause where my question just hangs in the air, he says, ‘I don’t know if I ever loved Genevieve. How would I even know what that felt like? I’m seventeen, for God’s sake.’

‘Seventeen’s not so young. A hundred years ago people got married when they were practically our age.’

‘Yeah, that was before electricity and the Internet. A hundred years ago eighteen-year-old guys were out there fighting wars with bayonets and holding a man’s life in their hands! They lived a lot of life by the time they were our age. What do kid our age know about love and life?’ I have never heard him talk like this before- like he cares about something. He is still all

worked up from his fight with Genevieve.

I wind my hair into a honey bun and secure it with a ponytail holder. ‘You know who you sound like? You sound like my grandpa,’ I say. ‘Also- I think you’re stalling because you don’t want to answer the question.’

‘I answered it; you just didn’t like my answer.’

We pull up in front of my house. Marcel turns off the engine, which is what he does when he wants to talk a little while longer. So, I do not

jump out right away, I put my bag in my lap and search for my keys even though the lights are on upstairs.

Gosh… To be sitting in the passenger seat of Marcel -’s black Audi. Isn’t that what every girl has ever wanted, in the history of boys and girls? Not Marcel - specifically, or yes, Marcel - specifically.

Marcel leans his head back against the headrest and closes his eyes.

I say, ‘Did you know that when people fight with each other, that

means they still really care about each other?’ When Marcel doesn’t answer, I say, ‘Genevieve must have a hold on you.’

I expect him to deny it, but he does not. Instead, he says, ‘She does, but I wish she didn’t. I do not want to be owned by anyone. Or belong to anyone.’

Margot would say she belongs to herself. Kitty would say she belongs to no one.

-And-

I guess I would say I belong to my sisters and my dad, but that will not always be true.

To belong to someone- I did not know it, but now that I think about it, it seems like that is all- I have ever wanted. To be somebody is, and to have them be mine.

‘So that’s why you’re doing this,’ I tell him- I am partly asking but I am mostly telling.

‘To prove you don’t belong to her. Or with her.’ I stop. ‘Do you think there’s a difference?

Between belonging with and belonging to, I mean?’

‘Sure. One implies choice; the other doesn’t.’

‘You must love her to go to all this trouble.’

Marcel makes a dismissive sound. ‘You’re too dreamy-eyed.’

‘Thank you,’ I say, even though I know he does not mean it as a compliment.

I say it just to bug him.

I know I've succeeded when he says, his face sour, 'What would you know about love,

Lara Jean? You've never even had a boyfriend before.'

I am tempted to make up someone, a boy from camp, from another town, from anywhere. His name is Clint is on the tip of my tongue. But it would be too humiliating because he would know I was lying; I already told him I never dated anybody before.

-And-

Even if I had not, it is far more pathetic to make up a boyfriend than to just admit the truth. ‘No, I’ve never had a boyfriend. But plenty of people I know have had boyfriends, but they have never once been in love. I’ve been in love.’ That is why I am doing this.

Marcel snorts. ‘With whom? Josh Sanderson? That tool?’

‘He’s not a tool,’ I say, frowning at him. ‘You don’t even know him to say that.’

‘Anybody with one eye and half a brain could tell what a tool that guy is.’

‘Are you saying my sister’s blind and brainless?’ I demand. If he says one bad word about my sister, that is it. This whole thing is off. I do not need him that badly.

Marcel laughs. ‘No. I’m saying you are!’

‘You know what? I changed my mind. You’ve never loved anyone but yourself.’ I try to jerk the passenger door open, but it is locked.

‘Lara Jean, I was just kidding. Come on.’

‘See you on Monday.’

‘Wait, wait. First, tell me something.’ Marcel leans back in his seat. ‘How come you never dated anybody?’

I shrug. ‘I don’t know - because nobody ever asked?’

‘Bullshit. I know that Martinez asked you to homecoming and you said no.’

I am surprised he knows about that. ‘What is it with you guys all calling each other by your last name?’ I ask him. ‘It’s so- ‘I struggle to find the right word.

‘Affected?

Affected?’

‘Don’t change the subject.’

‘I said no because I was scared.’ I stare out the window and run my finger along with the glass, making an M for Martinez.

‘Of Tommy?’

‘No! I like Tommy. It’s not that. It is scary when it is real. When it is not just thinking about a person, but, like, having a real live person in front of you, with, like, expectations. And wants.’ I finally look at Marcel, and I am surprised by how hard he is paying attention; his eyes are intent and focused on me like he is interested in what I am saying. ‘Even when I liked a boy so much, loved him even, I- would always rather be with my sisters, because that’s where I belong.’

‘Wait. What about right now?’

‘Right now? Well, I don’t like you that way so -’

‘Good,’ Marcel says. ‘Don’t go falling for me again, okay? I cannot have any more girls in love with me. It’s exhausting.’

I laugh aloud. ‘You’re so full of yourself.’

‘I’m kidding,’ he protests, but he is not. ‘What did you ever see in me anyway?’ He grins at me then, overconfident again and so sure of his charm.

‘Honestly? I really couldn’t tell you.’

The grin falters and then rights itself, but now it is not so certain. ‘You said it was because I make people feel special. You - you said it was because I was a good dancer, and I was science partners with Jeffrey Suttleman!’

‘Wow, you memorized every single word of that letter, huh?’ I tease.

It gives- me a small, mean surge of satisfaction to see Marcel’s grin fade completely.

That surge is immediately followed by remorse because now I have hurt his feelings for no good reason.

What is it in me that wants to hurt Marcel's feelings? To make it better, I quickly add, 'No, it's true- you did have something about you then.'

I guess- I made it worse because he flinches.

I do not know what else to say, so I open the car door and climb out. 'Thanks for the ride, Marcel.'

When I get inside the house, I go look in the kitchen first to check on the cupcakes.

They are packed away in Tupperware and my cupcake carrier. The frosting's a little messy and the sprinkles are haphazard, but overall, they look surprisingly good. That is a relief. Kitty will not be shamed at the PTA bake sale on my account, at least!

From: Margot Covey mcovey@st-andrews.ac.uk

To: Lara Jean Covey larajeansong@gmail.com

How’s school going so far? Have you joined any new clubs? I think you should consider Lit Mag or Model UN. Also, do not forget it is Korean Thanksgiving this week and you must call Grandma, or she will be mad! Miss, you, guys.

PS, please send Oreos! I miss our dunk contests.

Love, M

From: Lara Jean Covey larajeansong@gmail.com

To: Margot Covey mcovey@st-andrews.ac.uk

The school is good. No new clubs yet, but we will see. I already have it down in my planner to call Grandma. Do not worry about a thing, I have everything under control here!

Marcel's MOM OWNS AN ANTIQUE store called Linden & White in the cobblestone part of downtown. She sells furniture mostly, but she has jewelry cases too, arranged by decades. My favorite decade is the aughts, which means the 1900's. There is this one

gold heart locket with a tiny diamond chip in the center; it looks like a starburst.

It costs four hundred dollars. The store is right next to McCall's bookstore, so I go in sometimes and visit with it. I always expect it to be gone, but then it never is.

We once bought our mom a gold clover pin from the 1940s for Mother’s Day. Margot and I ran a lemonade stand every Saturday for a month, and we were able to- chip in sixteen dollars for it. I remember how

proud we were when we presented Daddy with the- money, we had it nice and neat in a Ziplock bag. At the time I thought we were paying- the lion's share and my dad was only helping a little. I realize now that the pin cost a lot more than sixteen dollars. I should ask Daddy how much it cost.

But then- I do not want to know. It is nicer not knowing. We buried her with it because it was her favorite.

I am standing over the case, touching my finger to the glass, when

Marcel comes out from around back. ‘Hey,’ he says, surprised.

‘Hey,’ I say. ‘What are you doing here?’

Marcel gives me a look like I am a dummy. ‘My mom owns the place, remember?’

‘Well, duh. I’ve just never seen you here before,’ I say. ‘Do you work here?’

‘Nah, I had to drop something off for my mom. Now she is saying I must go pick up a set of chairs in

Huntsburgh tomorrow,' Marcel says in a grumbly voice. 'It's two hours there and back. Annoying.'

I nod companionably and lean away from the case. I pretend to look at a pink-and-black globe. Margot would like this. It could be a nice Christmas present for her.

I give it a little spin. 'How much is this globe?'

'Whatever it says on the sticker.' Marcel rests his elbows on the case and leans forward. 'You should come.'

I look up at him. ‘Come where?’

‘To pick up the chairs with me.’

‘You just complained about how annoying it’s going to be.’

‘Yeah, alone. If you go, it might be slightly less annoying.’

‘Gee, thanks.’

‘You’re welcome.’

I roll my eyes. Marcel says ‘you’re welcome’ to everything! It is like, no, Marcel, that was not a genuine

thank-you, so you do not need to say you're welcome.

'So, are you coming or what?'

'Or what.'

'Come on! I am picking the chairs up from an estate sale. The owner was a shut-in. Stuff has just been sitting there for like fifty years. I bet there will be stuff you can look at. You like old stuff, right?'

'Yes,' I say, surprised that he knows this about me. 'Actually, I've kind of always wanted to go to an

estate sale. How did the owner die? Like, how long was it before someone found him?'

'God, you're morbid.' He shudders. 'Didn't know you had that side to you.'

'I have lots of sides to me,' I tell him. I lean forward. 'So? How did he die?'

'He isn't dead, you weirdo. He is just old. His family's sending him to a nursing home.'

Marcel raises an eyebrow at me. ‘So, I’ll pick you up tomorrow at seven.’

‘Seven? You never said anything about leaving at seven in the morning on a Saturday!’

‘Sorry,’ he says contritely. ‘We have to go early before all the good stuff gets snatched up.’

That night I pack lunches for Marcel and me. I make roast beef sandwiches with cheese and tomato, mayonnaise for me, mustard for Marcel. Marcel does not like

mayonnaise. It is funny the things you pick up in a fake relationship.

Kitty zooms into the kitchen and tries to grab a sandwich half. I smack her hand away.

‘That’s not for you.’

‘Then who’s it for?’

‘It’s for my lunch tomorrow. Mine and Marcel’s.’

She climbs onto a stool and watches me wrap the sandwiches in wax paper.

Sandwiches look so much prettier wrapped in the wax paper than encased in Ziplock. Any chance I get, I use wax paper. ‘I like Marcel,’ Kitty says. ‘He’s a lot different than Josh, but I like him.’

I look up. ‘What do you mean?’

‘I don’t know. He is funny. He jokes around a lot. You must be in love if you are making sandwiches for him. When Margot and Josh first became a couple, she made three-cheese macaroni and cheese all the time because that is his favorite.

Continued: 1

What’s Marcel’s favorite?’

‘I- I don’t know. I mean, he likes everything.’

Kitty gives me the side-eye. ‘If you’re his girlfriend, you should know what his favorite food is.’

‘I know he doesn’t like mayonnaise,’ I offer.

‘That’s because mayonnaise is gross. Josh hates mayonnaise too.’

I feel a pang. Josh does hate mayonnaise. ‘Kitty, do you miss Josh?’

She nods. ‘I wish he still came over.’ A wistful look crosses her face, and I am about to give her a hug when she puts her hands on her hips. ‘Just don’t use all the roast beef because I need it for my lunch next week.’

‘If we run out, I’ll make tuna salad. Sheesh.’ ‘See that you do,’ Kitty says and zooms off again.

‘See that you do’? Where does she get this stuff?

At seven-thirty I am sitting by the window, waiting for Marcel to pull up. I have a brown paper bag with our sandwiches and my camera, in case there is anything spooky or cool I can take a picture of. I am picturing a crumbling, gray old mansion as you see in horror movies, with a gate and a murky pond or a maze in the backyard.

Marcel's mom's minivan pulls up at seven forty-five, which is annoying. I could have slept a whole hour longer. I run out to the car and hop inside, and before I can say a word,

he says, ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry. But look what I brought you.’ He passes me a donut in a napkin, still warm. ‘I stopped and got it special, right when they opened at seven-thirty. It’s mocha sugar.’

I break off a piece and pop it into my mouth. ‘Yum!’

He gives me a sidelong glance as he pulls out of my driveway. ‘So- I did the right thing being late, right?’

I nod, taking a big bite. ‘You did the exact right thing,’ I say, my mouth full.

‘Hey, do you have any water?’

Marcel hands me a half-full water bottle and I gulp it down. ‘This is the best donut I ever had,’ I tell him.

‘Good,’ he says. Then he takes one look at me and laughs. ‘You have sugar all over your face.’

I wipe my mouth off with the other side of the napkin.

‘Cheeks, too,’ he says.

‘All right, all right.’ Then it is quiet, which makes me nervous. ‘Can I

put some music on?' I start pulling out my phone.

'Actually, do you mind if we just drive in quiet for a while? I can't have music blaring in my face before my caffeine kicks in.'

'Oh - sure.' I am not sure if that means he wants me to be quiet too. I would not have agreed to come on this little outing if I had known I would have to be silent.

Marcel has a serene look on his face like he is a fishing-boat captain, and we are floating placidly along in

the middle of the sea. Except he is not driving slowly; he is driving fast.

I stay quiet for all of ten seconds and then say, ‘Wait, where you are wanting me to be quiet too?’

‘No, I just didn’t want music. You can talk as much as you want.’

‘Okay.’ And then I am quiet because it is awkward when someone tells you-you- can talk as much as you want. ‘Hey, so what’s your favorite food?’

‘I like everything.’

‘But what’s your favorite? Like, you are favorite- favorite. Is it macaroni and cheese, or um, fried chicken, or steak, or pizza?’

‘I like all that stuff. Equally.’

I let out an aggrieved sigh. Why does Marcel not get the concept of picking a favorite thing?

Marcel's mimics my sigh and laughs. ‘Fine. I like cinnamon toast. That’s my favorite thing.’

‘Cinnamon toast?’ I repeat. ‘You like cinnamon toast better than crab legs? Better than a cheeseburger?’

‘Yes.’

‘Better than barbecue?’

Marcel hesitates. Then he says, ‘Yes! Now quit picking my choice apart. I stand by my choice.’

I shrug. ‘Okay.’ I wait, give him a chance to ask me what my favorite food is, but he does not. So- I say, ‘My favorite food is cake.’

‘What kind of cake?’

‘It doesn’t matter. All cake.’

‘You just gave me so much shit for not picking,’ he begins.

‘But it’s so hard to pick one kind!’ I burst out. ‘I mean, there’s coconut cake, the kind with white frosting that looks like a snowball- I like that a lot. But then I also like cheesecake, and lemon cake, and carrot cake. Also- red velvet cake with cream cheese frosting, and chocolate cake with chocolate ganache frosting.’ I pause.

‘Have you ever had an olive-oil cake?’

‘No. That sounds weird.’

‘It’s good. Moist and delicious. I’ll make it for you.’

Marcel groans. ‘You’re making me hungry. I should have gotten a whole bag of those donuts.’

I open my brown paper bag and pull out his sandwich. I wrote a P on his in Sharpie so- I would know whose was. ‘Do you want a sandwich?’

‘You made that for me?’

‘I mean, I was making one for myself, too. It would have been rude to just bring one sandwich and eat it in front of you.’

Marcel accepts the sandwich and eats it with the bottom half still wrapped.

‘This is good,’ he says, nodding. ‘What kind of mustard is this?’

Please, I say, ‘It’s beer mustard. My dad orders it from some fancy food catalog. My dad’s really into cooking.’ ‘Aren’t you going to eat yours, too?’

‘I’m saving it for later,’ I say.

Halfway into the ride, Marcel starts weaving in and out of traffic, and he keeps looking at the clock on the dashboard.

‘Why are we in such a hurry?’ I ask him.

‘The Epsteins,’ he says, rapping his fingers on the steering wheel.

‘Who are the Epsteins?’

‘They’re an old married couple with an antique store in Charlottesville.

Last time, Phil got there five minutes before me and cleared the whole place out. That's not going to happen today.'

Impressed, I say, 'Wow, I had no idea this business was so cutthroat.'

Like a know-it-all, Marcel smirks and goes, 'Isn't all business?'

I roll my eyes at the window. Marcel's so Marcel.

We're at a stoplight when Marcel suddenly sits up straight and says, 'Oh, shit! The Epsteins!'

I was half asleep. My eyes fly open, and I yell, ‘Where? Where?’

‘Red SUV! Two cars ahead on the right.’ I crane my neck to look. They are a gray-haired couple, in their sixties or seventies. It is hard to tell from this far away.

As soon as the light turns green, Marcel guns it and drives up on the shoulder. I scream out, ‘Go go go!’ and then we are flying past the Epsteins. My heart is racing out of control,

I cannot help but lean my head out the window and scream because it is such a thrill. My hair whips in the wind and I know it is going to be a tangled mess, but I could not care less.

‘Yahhh!’ I scream.

‘You’re crazy,’ Marcel says, pulling me back in by the hem of my shirt.

He is looking at me like he did that day I kissed him in the hallway. Like I am different than he thought.

We pull up to the house and there are already a few cars parked in front. I am craning my head trying to get a good look. I was expecting a mansion with a wrought iron gate and a gargoyle or two, but this just looks like a normal house. I must look disappointed, because as he puts the car in park, Marcel says to me, ‘Don’t judge an estate sale by the house. I’ve seen all kinds of treasures at regular houses and junk at fancy houses.’

I hop out and bend down to tie my shoelace. ‘Hurry, Lara Jean! The

Epsteins will be here any second!’ Marcel grabs my hand and we run up the driveway; I am breathing hard trying to keep up with him. His legs are so much longer than mine.

As soon as we are inside, Marcel goes right up to a man in a suit, and I bend over and try to catch my breath. A few people are milling around looking at the furniture. There is a long dining room table in the center of the room with China and milk glass and porcelain knickknacks. I go up to it and take a closer look. I like a little white

creamer with pink rosebuds, but I am not sure if I am allowed to touch it and see how much it costs. It could be expensive.

There is a big basket with olden-day Christmas memorabilia in it, plastic Santas and Rudolphs and glass ornaments. I am sifting through it when Marcel comes up to me, a huge grin on his face. ‘Mission accomplished,’ he says. He nods at an older couple who are looking at a wooden sideboard. ‘The Epsteins,’ he whispers to me.

‘Did you get the chairs?’ Mr. Epstein calls out. He is trying to sound casual and not annoyed, but his hands are on his hips, and he is standing very rigidly.

‘You know it,’ Marcel calls back. ‘Better luck next time.’ To me he says,

‘Do you see anything cool?’

‘Lots of stuff.’ I hold up a hot pink reindeer. It is glass, with an electric blue nose. ‘This would look great on my vanity. Will you ask the man how much it costs?’

‘No, but you can. It’ll be good for you to learn how to negotiate.’ Marcel grabs my hand and leads me over to the man in the suit. He is filling out some paperwork on a clipboard.

He looks terribly busy and important. I am not even sure if I am supposed to be here. I am thinking I do not need this reindeer.

But Marcel’s looking at me expectantly, so I clear my throat and say, ‘Excuse me, sir, but how much is this reindeer?’

‘Oh, that’s part of a lot,’ he says.

‘Oh. Um, I’m sorry but what’s a lot?’

‘It means it’s part of a set,’ he explains. ‘You have to buy the complete set of ornaments.

Seventy-five dollars. They’re vintage, you see.’

I start to back away. ‘Thank you anyway,’ I say.

Marcel pulls me back and gives him a winning smile and says, ‘Can’t

you just throw it in with the chairs? A gift with purchase?'

The man sighs. 'I don't want to separate them.' He turns away to flip through his clipboard.

Marcel throws me a look like You are the one who wants the reindeer; you should step up. I give him back a look that says I do not want it that bad, and Marcel shakes his head firmly and pushes me toward the man. I say, 'Please, sir? I will give you ten dollars for it.

No one will know they are missing a reindeer. And look, his paw is a little chipped on the bottom, see?' I hold it up.

'All right, all right. Just take it,' the man says begrudgingly, and I beam at him and start to pull my wallet out of my purse, but he waves me off.

'Thank you! Thank you so much.' I clutch the reindeer to my chest. Maybe haggling is not as hard as I thought.

Marcel winks at me, and then he says to the man, ‘I’ll bring my van closer so, we can load up the chairs.’

They go out the back, and I hang around, looking at the framed pictures on the wall. I wonder if they are for sale too. Some of them look old: black-and-white pictures of men in suits and hats.There is one picture of a girl in a confirmation dress, it is white and lacy like a wedding gown. The girl is not smiling, but she has a mischievous glint in her eye that reminds me of Kitty.

‘That’s my daughter, Patricia.’

I turn around. It is an old man in a navy-blue sweater and stiff jeans. He is leaning against the staircase watching me. He looks very frail; his skin is paperwhite and thin.

‘She lives in Ohio. She’s an accountant.’ He is still gazing at me as I remind him of someone.

‘Your house is lovely,’ I say, even though it is not. It is old; it could use a good cleaning.

But the things inside it are lovely.

‘It’s empty now. All my things sold up. Can’t take it with you, you know.’

‘You mean when you die?’ I whisper.

He glares at me. ‘No. I mean to the nursing home.’

Whoops. ‘Right,’ I say, and I giggle the way I do when I feel awkward.

‘What do you have there in your hand?’

I lift it. ‘This. He- the man in the suit gave it to me. Do you want it back? I did not pay for it. It’s part of a lot.’

He smiles, and the wrinkles in his paper skin deepen. ‘That was Patty’s favorite.’

I hold it out to him. ‘Maybe she’d like to keep it?’

‘No, you have it. It is yours. She couldn’t even be bothered to help

me move, so.’ He gives a spiteful nod. ‘Is there anything else you want to take? I’ve got a trunk full of her old clothes.’

Yikes. Family drama. Best not to get involved in that. But vintage clothes!

That is tempting.

When Marcel finds me, I am sitting cross-legged on the floor in the music room, looking through an old trunk. Mr. Clarke is snoozing on the couch next to me. I found a mod minidress the color of cotton candy

pink that I am crazy about, and a sleeveless button-down with little daisies on it that I can tie at the waist. ‘Look, Marcel!’ I lift the dress.

‘Mr. Clarke said I could have it.’

‘Who’s Mr. Clarke?’ Marcel asks, and his voice fills the room.

I point at him and put my finger to my lips.

‘Well, we’d better get out of here fast before the guy in charge of

the sale sees him giving stuff away for free.'

I get up in a hurry. 'Bye, Mr. Clarke,' I say, not too loud. Better to let him sleep. He was very down earlier when he was telling me about his divorce.

Mr. Clarke's eyes flutter open. 'Is this your feller?'

'No, not really,' I say, and Marcel throws his arm around my shoulder and says, 'Yes, sir. I'm her feller.'

I do not like the way he says it like he is making fun. Of both me and Mr.

Clarke. ‘Thank you for the clothes, Mr. Clarke,’ I say, and he sits up straight and reaches for my hand. I give it to him, and he kisses it, and his lips feel like dry moth’s wings.

‘You’re welcome, Patty.’

I give him a goodbye wave and grab my new things. As we walk out the front door, Marcel says, ‘Who’s Patty?’ and I pretend I do not hear.

I must fall asleep in about two seconds from the excitement of the day, because the next thing I know, we are parked in my driveway, and Marcel's shaking my shoulder, saying, 'We're here, Lara Jean.'

I open my eyes. I am clutching my dress and shirt to my chest like a security blanket, and my reindeer is on my lap. My new treasures. I feel like I just robbed a bank and got away with it. 'Thanks for today, Marcel.'

'Thanks for coming with me.' Then, abruptly, he says, 'Oh yes. I

forgot to ask you something. My mom wants you to come over to dinner tomorrow night.'

My mouth drops. 'You told your mom about us?'

Marcel gives me a dirty look. 'Kitty knows about us! Besides, my mom and I are close.

It is just her and me and my brother, Owen. If you do not want to come, then do not come.

But just know that my mom will think you're rude if you don't.'

‘I’m just saying - the more people that know, the harder it is to manage.

You have to keep lies restricted to as few people as possible.’

‘How do you know so much about lying?’

‘Oh, I used to lie all the time as a kid.’ I did not think of it as lying, though. I thought of it as playing make-believe. I told Kitty she was adopted, and her real family was in a traveling circus. It is why she took up gymnastics.

IM NOT SURE HOW DRESSED up I should get for dinner at Marcel's house. At the store, his mom seems so fancy. I just do not want to meet her and have her be thinking of all the ways that I am lacking compared to Genevieve. I do not see why I must meet her at all.

But I do want her to like me.

I go through my closet, and then Margot's closet. I finally pick a cream-colored sweater and a blouse with a Marcel Pan collar, with a corduroy mustard circle skirt.

Plus, tights and flats. Then I put on some makeup, which I hardly ever wear. I put on peach blush, and I try to do some eye makeup, but I end up washing everything off and starting over again, this time with just mascara and lip gloss. I go show Kitty and she says, ‘Looks like a uniform.’

‘Like in an effective way?’

Kitty nods. ‘Like you work at a nice store.’

Before Marcel arrives at my house, I go on the computer and look

up what fork to use with what, just in case.

It is strange… Sitting at Marcel's kitchen table, I feel like I am living someone else's life. It turns out Marcel's mom has made pizzas, so I did not even need to worry about forks. And their house is not fancy on the inside; it is only normal and nice. There is a real butter churner on display in the kitchen, pictures of Marcel and his brother hanging on the walls of wooden frames, and red-and-white gingham everything.

There are a bunch of pizza toppings on the breakfast bar- not just pepperoni, sausage, mushroom, and pepper, but also artichoke hearts and greasy kalamata olives and fresh mozzarella and whole cloves of garlic.

Marcel’s mom is nice. She keeps putting more salad on my plate throughout dinner, and I keep eating it even though I am full. Once, I catch her looking at me, and she has a soft smile on her face. When she smiles, she looks like Marcel.

Marcel’s younger brother is named Owen. He is twelve. He is like a miniature Marcel, but he does not talk as much. He does not have Marcel’s effortless way. Owen grabs a slice of pizza and shoves it into his mouth even though it is too hot. He puffs out stifling air and he almost spits a piece back out into his napkin, and their mom says, ‘Don’t you dare, Owen. We have company.’

‘Leave me alone,’ Owen mumbles.

‘Marcel says you have two sisters,’ Mrs. - says with a bright smile.

She cuts a piece of lettuce into bite-sized bits. ‘Your mother must love having three girls.’

I open my mouth to answer her, but before I can, Marcel does. He says, ‘Lara Jean’s mom passed away when she was little.’ He says it as she should already know, and embarrassment crosses her face.

‘I’m so sorry. I remember that now.’

Quickly I say, ‘She did love having three girls. They thought for sure my little sister Kitty was going to be a boy, and my mom said she was so used to girls she was nervous about what she was going to do with a boy. So, she was relieved when Kitty turned out to be a girl. My sister Margot and I were too; we would pray every night we’d get a sister and not a brother.’

‘Hey, what’s wrong with boys?’ Marcel objects.

Mrs. -’s smiling now. She puts another piece of pizza on Owen’s plate and says,

‘You’re heathens. Wild animals. I bet Lara Jean and her sisters are angels.’ Marcel snorts.

‘Well - Kitty might be part heathen,’ I admit. ‘But my older sister Margot and I are fairly good.’

Mrs. - takes her napkin and tries to wipe tomato sauce off Owen’s face, and he swats her hand away. ‘Mom!’

When she gets up to take another pizza out of the oven, Marcel says to me, ‘See how my mom babies him?’

‘She babies you way more,’ Owen counters. To me, he mumbles, ‘Marcel doesn’t even know how to cook ramen.’

I laugh. ‘Can you?’

‘Hell yes, I’ve been cooking for myself for years,’ he says.

‘I like to cook too,’ I say, taking a sip of iced tea. ‘We should give Marcel a cooking lesson.’

He eyes me and then says, ‘You wear more makeup than Genevieve did.’

I shrink back as he slapped me. All I am wearing is mascara! And a little lip gloss! I know that Genevieve wears bronzer, eyeshadow, and concealer every day.

Plus, mascara, eyeliner, and lipstick! Swiftly Marcel says, ‘Shut up, Owen.’

Owen’s snickering. I narrow my eyes. This kid is only a few years older than Kitty!

I lean forward and wave my hand in front of my face. ‘This is all-natural. But thank you for the compliment, Owen.’

‘You’re welcome,’ he says, just like his big brother.

On the drive home, I say, ‘Hey, Marcel?’

‘What?’

‘Never mind.’

‘What? Just ask.’

‘Well - your parents are divorced, right?’

‘Yup.’

‘So how often do you see your dad?’

‘Not often.’

‘Oh, okay. I was just wondering.’ Marcel looks over at me with expectant eyes.

‘What?’ I speak.

‘I’m just waiting for the next question. You never just have one question.’

‘Well, do you miss him?’

‘Who?’

‘Your dad!’

‘Oh. I do not know. It is more than I miss how it used to be with us.

He and my mom and me and Owen. We were like a team. He used to come to every lacrosse game.’

Marcel gets quiet. ‘He just - took care of things.’

‘I guess that’s what dads do.’

‘That’s what he’s doing for his new family.’ Marcel says it matter-of-factly, without bitterness. ‘What about you? You miss your mom?’

‘Sometimes, when I think about it.’ Suddenly I say, ‘You know what I miss? I miss bath time. I miss when she would wash my hair. Don’t you think getting your hair washed is just the best feeling? Like, warm water and

bubbles and fingers in your hair. It’s so nice.’

‘Yeah, it is.’

‘Sometimes I do not think about her at all, and then - and then sometimes I will have a thought like, I wonder what she would think of me now? She only knew me as a little girl, and now I’m a teenager, and I wonder, if she saw me on the street, would she recognize me?’

‘Of course, she would. She’s your mom.’

‘I know, but I’ve changed a lot.’ An uncomfortable look has crossed his face, and I can tell he is regretting complaining about his dad because at least his dad is still alive.

-And-

Then, because Marcel’s looking at me like he feels sorry for me, I straighten up and say in a haughty voice, ‘I’m very mature, you know.’

He is grinning now. ‘Oh, yes?’

‘Oh, yes, I’m very refined, Marcel.’

When Marcel drops me off, right before I get out of the car, he says, ‘I can tell my mom liked you.’ This makes me feel good inside. It has always been important to me that other people’s moms like me.

It was my favorite part of going over to Genevieve’s house- hanging out with her mom. Wendy was so stylish. She used to wear a silky blouse and nice pants and a statement necklace, just for sitting around the house. Perfect hair, always smooth and flat. Genevieve has that same good hair, but

she does not have her mom’s perfectly straight nose. Hers has a little bump on the bridge that I think only adds to her appeal.

‘You don’t wear more makeup than Gen. She was always getting bronzer on my white shirts.’

For someone who is over Genevieve, he sure does talk about her a lot.

Though it is not just him. I was thinking about her too. Even when she is not here, she is here. That girl has reach.

Continued: 2

DURING CHEMISTRY, Marcel WRITES ME a note that says, Can I come over tonight to study for the test?

I write back, I do not remember study sessions being in the contract. After he reads it, he turns around and gives me a wounded look. I mouth, I am kidding!

At dinner, I announce that Marcel’s coming over to study and we are going to need the kitchen, and my dad raises his eyebrows. ‘Leave the door open,’ he jokes.

We do not even have a door to the kitchen.

‘Daddy,’ I groan, and Kitty groans with me. Casually he asks, ‘Is Marcel your boyfriend?’

‘Um - something like that,’ I say.

After we eat and Kitty and I do the dishes, I set up the kitchen like a study room. My textbook and notes are stacked up in the center of the table, with a row of highlighters in blue, yellow, and pink, a bowl of microwave kettle corn, and a plate of peanut-

butter brownies I baked this afternoon. I let Kitty have two but that is it.

He said he would be over around eight. At first, he is just late as usual, but the minutes tick by and I realize he is not coming. I text him once, but he does not text back.

Kitty comes down between commercial breaks, sniffing around for another brownie, which I give her. ‘Is Marcel not coming?’ she asks. I pretend I am so absorbed in my studying I do not hear.

Um around ten he sends a text that says, Sorry, something came up. I cannot come over tonight.

He does not say where he is or what he is doing, but I already know. He is with Genevieve.

At lunch he was distracted; he kept texting on his phone. And then, later in the day, I saw them outside the girls' locker room. They did not see me, but I saw them.

They were just- talking, but with Genevieve, it is never just anything. She put her hand on his arm;

he brushed her hair out of her eyes. I may only be a fake girlfriend, but that is not anything.

I keep studying, but it is hard to concentrate when your feelings are hurt. I tell myself it is just because I went to the trouble of baking brownies and cleaning up the downstairs.

I mean, it is rude to just not show up somewhere. Does he not have manners?

How would- he like it if I did that? And really, what is the whole point of this charade if he is just going-

to keep going back to her anyway? What is even in it for me anymore?

Things are better with Josh and me, normal. If I wanted to, I could just call the whole thing off.

The next morning, I wake up still mad. I call Josh to ask him for a ride to school. For a- second, I worry he might not pick up; it has been so long since we spent time together.

But he does, and he says no problem.

Let us see how Marcel likes it when he comes to my house to pick me up and I am not there.

Halfway to school, I start to feel uneasy. Marcel had a legitimate reason for not- coming over. He was not with Genevieve and now I have just done a very petty thing out of spite.

Josh is looking at me with suspicious eyes. ‘What’s wrong?’

‘Nothing.’

He does not believe me, I can tell. ‘Did you and - have a fight?’

‘No.’

Josh sighs and says, ‘Just be careful.’ He says it in a patronizing older brother kind of way that makes me want to scream. ‘I don’t want to see you hurt by that guy.’

‘Josh! He will not hurt me. Geez.’

‘He’s a douche. I am sorry, but he is. All the guys on the lacrosse team are.

Guys like-, they only care about one thing. As soon as they get what they want, they're bored.'

'Not Marcel. He dated Genevieve for almost four years!'

'Just trust me. You haven't had much experience with guys, Lara Jean.'

Quietly I ask, 'How would you know?'

Josh gives me an Oh, come on the look. 'Because I know you.'

'Not as well as you think.'

We are quite the rest of the way.

It will not be that big of a deal. Marcel will stop by my house, see that I am not there, and- then he will leave. Big deal, so he had to go five minutes out of his way. I waited for him last night for two friggin' hours.

When we get to school, Josh heads for the senior hall and I go straight to the junior hall. I keep sneaking peeks down the hallway at Marcel's locker, but he does not arrive. I wait at my locker until the bell rings,

and he still does not come. I run off to the first period, my backpack banging against my back as I go.

Mr. Schuller is taking attendance when I look up and see Marcel standing in the doorway glaring at me.

He gestures at me to come out. I gulp and quickly look down at- my notebook and pretend like I did not see him. But then he hisses my name, and I know I must talk to him.

Shakily I raise my hand. ‘Mr. Schuller, can I go to the bathroom?’

‘You should have gone before class,’ he grumbles, but he waves me on.

I hurry out to the hallway and pull Marcel away from the door so Mr. Schuller cannot see.

‘Where were you this morning?’ Marcel demands.

I cross my arms and try to stand tall. It is hard because I am so short, and he Were is- tall.

‘You’re one to talk.’

Marcel huffs, ‘At least I texted you! I have called you like seventeen times.

Why is your phone off?’

‘You know we’re not allowed to have our phones on at school!’

He huffs, ‘Lara Jean, I waited in front of your house for twenty minutes.’

Yikes. ‘Well, I’m sorry.’

‘How’d you get to school? Sanderson?’

‘Yes.’

Marcel exhales. ‘Listen, if you were pissed, I couldn’t come over last night, you should’ve just called and said so instead of the shit you pulled this morning.’

In a small voice, I say, ‘Well, what about that shit you pulled last night?’

A smile tugs at the corners of his mouth. ‘Did you just say ‘shit’? It sounds really funny coming out of your mouth.’

I ignore that. ‘So - were you? Were you with Genevieve?’ I do not ask

what I want to know, which is, did you guys get back together?

He hesitates and then he says, ‘She needed me.’

I cannot even look at him. Why is he such a dummy? Why does she have such a hold on him?

Is it just the amount of time they have been together? Is it sex? I do not understand. It is disappointing, how little self-control boys have. ‘Marcel, if you’re just going to go running every time she beckons, I don’t see a point to any of this.’

‘Covey, come on! I said I was sorry. Don’t be pissed.’

‘You never said you were sorry,’ I say. ‘When did you say you were sorry?’

Chastened, he says, ‘Sorry.’

‘I don’t want you to go to Genevieve’s anymore. How do you think that makes me look to her?’

Marcel looks at me steadily. ‘I can’t be there for Gen, so don’t ask me to.’

‘But Marcel, what does she even need you for when she has a new boyfriend?’

He flinches, and right away I am sorry I said it. ‘I’m sorry,’ I whisper.

‘It’s fine. I do not expect you to understand it. Gen and I - we just get each other.’

He does not know it, but when Marcel talks about Genevieve, he gets a certain softness- in his face.

Its tenderness mixed with impatience. And something else.

Love. Marcel can protest all he wants, but I know he still loves her.

Sighing, I ask, ‘Did you at least study for the test?’

Marcel shakes his head, and I sigh again.

‘You can look at my notes during lunch,’ I say, and I head back to my class.

It is starting to make sense to me. Why he would go along with a scheme like this, why he would spend

his time with someone like me. It is not so he can move on from Gen.

It is so he- cannot. I am just his excuse. I am holding Genevieve's place for her. When that piece makes sense, everything else starts to.

JOSH'S PARENTS FIGHT A LOT- I do not know if it is a normal amount of fighting because I- only have one parent, but I do not remember my parents fighting that much when I had two. Our houses are close enough that I can hear them sometimes if my window is open.

The fights usually start with something small, like Mrs. Sanderson accidentally leaving the car door open and the battery going dead, and end with something big, like how Mr. Sanderson works too much and is inherently selfish and not cut out for a family.

When they fight bad, Josh comes over. When we were younger, he would sneak out sometimes in his pajamas with his pillow, and he would stay until his mom came looking for him. It is not something we talk about.

He and Margot, but not me and him. The most he ever said about it was that sometimes he wished they would just get divorced- so it could finally be over. They never did, though.

I can hear them tonight. I have heard those other nights since Margot left, but tonight sounds particularly bad. So, bad I close my window. I gather up my- homework and go- downstairs and turn on the living room light so Josh knows he can come over if he wants.

Half an hour later there is a knock at the door. I wrap myself in my pale blue baby blanket and open it.

It is Josh. He smiles at me sheepishly. ‘Hey. Can I spend time together here for a bit?’

‘Course you can.’ I leave the door open and trudge back to the living room. I call back, ‘Lock it behind you.’

Josh watches TV and I do my homework. I am highlighting my way through US history when Josh asks me, ‘Are you going to try out for Arcadia?’

That is the spring play. They just announced it yesterday.

'No,' I say, switching highlighter colors. 'Why would I?' I hate public speaking and getting up in front of people, and Josh knows it.

'Duh, because it's your favorite play.' Josh changes the channel. 'I think you'd be a really good Thomasina.'

I smile. 'Thanks, but no thanks.'

‘Why not? It could be something good to put on your college apps.’

‘It’s not like I’m going to be a theater major or anything.’

‘It wouldn’t kill you to get out of your comfort zone a little bit,’ he says, stretching his arms out behind his head. ‘Take a risk. Look at Margot. She’s all the way over in Scotland.’

‘I’m not Margot.’

‘I’m not saying you should move to the other side of the world. I

know you would never do that. Hey, what about Honor Council? You love judging people!'

I make a face at him.

'Or Model UN. I bet you would like that. I am just saying - your world could be bigger than just playing checkers with Kitty and riding around in -'s car.'

I stop highlighting midsentence. Is he right? Is my world that small?

It is not like- his world is so big! ‘Josh,’ I begin. Then I pause because I do not know how I am going to finish the sentence. So instead, I throw my highlighter at him.

It ricochets off his forehead. ‘Hey! You could have hit me in the eye!’

‘And you would have deserved it.’

‘Okay, okay. You know I did not mean it like that. I just mean that you should give people a chance to know you.’ Josh points the remote control at me and says, ‘If people knew you, they

would love you.’ He sounds so matter of fact.

Josh, you break my heart. And you are a liar. Because you know me, you know me better than anybody, and you do not love me.

After Josh goes back home, I tidy up the living room, lock all the doors, and turn off the lights. Then I pour myself a glass of water and head upstairs.

The light is on in my bedroom, and Chris is asleep in my bed. I roll her

to the side- so I can fit in too. Stirring, she mumbles, ‘Want to get hot wings?’

‘It’s too late to eat hot wings,’ I say, pulling my quilt up so it covers both of us. ‘You just missed Josh.’

Her eyes fly open. ‘Joshy was here? Why?’

‘No reason.’ I will not tell Josh’s secrets, not even to Chris.

‘Well, don’t mention it too -.’
‘He wouldn’t care,’ I say.

Chris shakes her head. ‘All boys care.’

‘Marcel’s not like that. He’s confident.’

‘They’re the ones that care the most,’ she says. I am about to ask her what- she means, but before I can, she says, ‘Let us do something wild.’

‘Like what?’ It is a school night; I cannot go anywhere, and she knows it. But I still like to hear her schemes. They are like bedtime stories.

‘Like - I don’t know. We could sneak into the nursing home and break out that grandma you are always

talking about. What is her name again? Thunder?'

I giggle. 'Stormy.'

'Yeah, Stormy.' She yawns. 'She seems like she knows how to have an enjoyable time. I bet she'd buy us cocktails.'

'Stormy goes to sleep at nine every night to get her beauty rest. Let us do it tomorrow.'

By tomorrow, Chris will have forgotten all about it, but it is still a

nice thought. Her eyes are closed again.

I poke her in the side. ‘Chris, wake up. Go brush your teeth.’ I keep a toothbrush in my bathroom drawer just for her. I painted a cursive C on it with red nail polish, so it does not get mixed up with anybody else’s toothbrush.

‘Can’t. I’m too tired to move.’

‘A second ago you wanted to break Stormy out of Belleview, and now you’re too tired to wash your face and brush your teeth?’ Chris smiles but

does not open her eyes. I turn off my bedside lamp. ‘Night, Chris.’

She wriggles closer to me. ‘G’night.’

THERE ARE VERY LIMITED Options for Asian girls on Halloween.

Like one year- I went as Velma from Scooby-Doo, but people just asked me if I was a manga character. I even wore a wig! So now I am committed to dressing up as Asian characters solely.

Margot never goes as a person; she is always an inanimate object or a

concept of some kind. Like last year she went as a ‘formal apology’: she wore a floor-length evening- gown we found at Goodwill for ten dollars, and she had a sign around her neck, written in- calligraphy, which said, I am sorry. It won second prize in the school contest.

The first prize went to a Rastafarian alien.

Kitty’s going as a ninja, which I suppose is in line with my whole Asian costume idea.

This year I am going to Cho Chang from Harry Potter. I have my

Raven claw scarf and an old black choir robe I found on eBay, plus one of my dad's ties and a wand. I am not going to win any contests, but at least people will know what I am. I wish I never have to answer a What are you? The question ever again.

I am waiting for Marcel to pick me up for school, messing with my knee highs. They will not stay up.

'Lara Jean!'

Automatically I call back, 'Josh!' It is our version of Marco Polo.

Then I look up. There's Josh, standing in front of his car. In a full-on Harry Potter costume. Black robe, glasses, lightning mark on his forehead, wand.

We both burst out laughing. Of all the random costumes! Ruefully Josh says, 'The guys from the graphic-novel club are going as different fantasy-book characters.

I- was going to- go as Drogo from Game of Thrones because, you know, I've got the upper body for it, but-'

I giggle, trying to picture Josh with eyeliner and a long braid and no shirt.

It is a funny picture. I would not exactly call Josh scrawny, but -

‘Hey, quit laughing so hard,’ the objects. ‘It wasn’t that funny.’ He jingles his keys. ‘So- do you need a ride, Cho?’

I look at my phone. Marcel’s five minutes late as usual. Not that I can complain, because it is a free ride to school, and I could be taking the bus. But if I go with Josh, I will not have to

rush to class, I can go to my locker, I can go pee, I can get a juice at the vending machine. But he is already here. ‘Thanks, but I’m waiting for Marcel.’

Josh nods. ‘Oh, yes - right.’ He starts to climb into his car.

I shout out, ‘Expelliarmus!’ and Josh spins around and calls back, ‘Finite!’

Then we grin at each other like goofs.

He drives off and I hug my knees to my chest. Josh and I read Harry Potter around the- same time when I was in sixth and he was in seventh. Margot had already read them.

Neither of us can read as fast as she does. It drove her crazy waiting for us to get to the third book- so we could discuss it.

The longer I sit waiting for Marcel, the more- prickly I feel. I take off my robe and put it back on a few times. It is polyester, and polyester

does not breathe or feel nice against-
your skin.

When he drives up, I run to his car and get in without saying hello. I spread my robe over my lap like a blanket because my kilt is short.

His eyes are big. ‘You look hot,’ he says, sounding surprised. ‘What are you? An anime character…?’

‘No,’ I say, or more like a snap. ‘I’m Cho Chang.’ Marcel still has a blank look on his face, so I add, ‘From Harry Potter.’

‘Oh yes. Cool.’

I look over at him. He is wearing a regular button-down and jeans. ‘Where’s your costume?’

‘I and my boys are going to change right before the assembly. It’s a better effect if we unveil at the same time.’

I know he wants me to ask what his costume is, but I do not want to talk to him, so I- sit there, not saying anything and looking out the window. I keep waiting for him to ask- me what is wrong, but he does not. He is so

oblivious; I do not even think he notices I am mad.

Abruptly I say, ‘I wish you weren’t always late.’

Marcel frowns. ‘Geez, sorry. I was trying to get my costume together.’

‘Today you were trying to get your costume together. But you’re late all the time.’

‘I’m not late all the time!’

‘You were late today, and yesterday, and last Thursday.’ I stare

out the window. The autumn leaves are already falling.

‘If you’re not going to be on time, I don’t- want you giving me rides anymore.’

I do not have to look; I can feel him glaring at me. ‘Fine. That means I get five extra minutes of sleep, so, works for me.’

‘Good.’

During the judging, Chris and I are sitting on the balcony of the theater.

Chris is dressed- up like Courtney Love. She is wearing a layoff notice and holey knee socks and lots of smudgy eye makeup.

‘You should go down there too,’ I say. ‘I bet you’d win something.’

‘People at this school wouldn’t even know who she is,’ Chris sneers. But I can tell she wants to.

The guys in Marcel’s group are all superheroes. There’s Batman, Superman, Iron Man, the Incredible Hulk, all to varying degrees of effort. Marcel went all out. He is, of course,

Marcel Parker. Who else would - go as? His Spider-Man costume is super authentic, with yellow Mylar eyes and gloved hands and booted feet. He is a total ham up onstage.

All the guys run around, capes flapping, pretend to fight each other. Marcel tries to climb-

up a column, but Mr. Yelznik stops him before he can get far. I cheer when his group wins for the best group costume.

Genevieve is Catwoman. She is wearing leather leggings and a bustier

and black cat- ears. I wonder if she was in on the superhero theme, if Marcel told her, or if she came up- with that on her own. Every guy in the auditorium goes wild when she goes on stage for the best junior costume. ‘What a ho,’ Chris says. She sounds almost wistful.

Genevieve wins, of course. I sneak a look at Marcel, and he is whistling and stomping his feet with all his friends.

After the assembly, I am getting my Chem book out of my locker when Marcel- comes over and leans his

back against the locker next to mine. Through his mask, he says, ‘Hey.’

‘Hey,’ I say. And then he does not say anything else; he just stands there. I close my locker door and spin the combination lock. ‘Congratulations on winning the best group costume.’

‘That’s it? That’s all you’re going to say?’

Huh? ‘What else am I supposed to say?’

Just then Josh walks by with Jersey Mike, who is dressed up as a

hobbit, hairy feet, and all. Walking backward, Josh points his wand at me and says, ‘Expelliarmus!’

Automatically I point my wand back at him and say, ‘Avada Kedavra!’

Josh clutches his chest as I have shot him. ‘Harsh!’ he calls out, and he disappears down the hallway.

‘Uh - don’t you think it’s weird for my supposed girlfriend to wear a couple- costume with another guy?’ Marcel asks me.

I roll my eyes. I am still mad at him from this morning. ‘I’m sorry, I can’t talk to you when you look like this. How am I supposed to have a conversation with a person in head-to-toe latex?’

Marcel pushes his mask up. ‘I’m serious! How do you think it makes me look?’

‘First of all, it wasn’t planned. Second, nobody cares what my costume is! Who would even notice something like that?’

‘People notice,’ Marcel huffs. ‘I noticed.’

‘Well, I’m sorry. I’m deeply sorry that a coincidence like this would ever occur.’

‘I doubt it was a coincidence,’ Marcel mutters.

‘What do you want me to do? Do you want me to pop over to the Halloween store during lunch and buy a red wig and be Mary Jane?’

Smoothly Marcel says, ‘Could you? That’d be great.’

‘No, I could not. You know why? Because I am Asian, and people will just think I’m in a manga costume.’ I hand him my wand. ‘Hold this.’ I lean down and lift the hem of my robe- so I can adjust my knee socks.

Frowning, he says, ‘I could have been someone from the book if you’d told me in advance.’

‘Yes, well, today you’d make a great Moaning Myrtle.’

Marcel gives me a blank look, and disbelieving, I say, ‘Wait a minute - have you never read ‘Harry Potter’?’

‘I’ve read the first two.’

‘Then you should know who Moaning Myrtle is!’

‘It was a really long time ago,’ Marcel says. ‘Was she one of those people in the paintings?’

‘No! And how could you stop after Chamber of Secrets? The third one is the best out of the whole series.

I mean, that’s crazy to me.’ I peer at his face. ‘Do you do not have a soul?’

‘Sorry if I haven’t read every single Harry Potter book! Sorry, I have a life and I’m not in the Final Fantasy club or whatever that geek club is called-’

I snatch my wand back from him and wave it in his face. ‘Silencio!’

Marcel crosses his arms. Smirking, he says, ‘Whatever spell you just tried to cast on me, it didn’t work, so you need to go back to Hogwarts.’ He is so proud of himself for the Hogwarts reference, it is endearing.

Quick like a cat, I pull down his mask, and then I put one hand over his mouth. With my- another hand I wave my wand again. ‘Silencio!’ Marcel tries to say something, but I press my hand harder. ‘What? What was that? I can’t hear you, Marcel Parker.’

Marcel reaches out and tickles me, and I laugh so hard I almost drop my wand. I dart away from him, but he pounces after me, pretends shooting webs at my feet.

Giggling, I- run away from him, further down the hall, dodging groups

of people. He gives chase all- the way to chem class. A teacher screams at us to slow down, and we do, but as soon as we are around the corner, I am running again and so is he.

I am breathless by the time I am in my seat. He turns around and shoots a web in my direction, and I explode into giggles again and Mr. Meyers glares at me.

‘Settle down,’ he says, and I nod obediently. As soon as his back is turned, I giggle into my robe.

I want to still be mad at Marcel, but it is just no use.

Halfway through class, he sends me a note. He is drawn spiderwebs around the edges.

It says I will be on time tomorrow. I smile as I read it. Then I put it in my backpack, in my French textbook so the page will not crease or crumble. I want to keep it so when this is over, I can have something to look at and remember what it was like to be Marcel’s girlfriend. Even if it was all just pretend.

WHEN WE PULL UP IN my driveway, Kitty runs out of the house and over to the car.

‘Spider-Man!’ she shrieks. She is still in her ninja costume, though she has taken the mask off. ‘Are you coming inside?’

I glance at Marcel. ‘He can’t. He has to go condition.’ Marcel spends an hour a day conditioning for lacrosse. He is very dedicated to it.

‘Condition?’ Kitty repeats, and I know she is imagining Marcel washing his hair.

‘I can spend time together for a little bit,’ Marcel says, turning the engine off.

‘Let us show him the dance!’

‘Kitty, no.’ The dance is something Margot and I made up when we were bored one- night a few summers ago at the beach.

Let us just say neither of us is particularly talented at choreography.

Marcel’s eyes light up. He will take any opportunity for a laugh, especially at my expense.

‘I want to see the dance!’

‘Forget about it,’ I tell him. We are in the living room; each of us has our couch or armchair. I poured us iced teas and put out a bowl of potato chips, which we have already finished.

‘Come on,’ he pouts. ‘Show me the dance. Please, please show me the dance.’

‘That’s not going to work on me, Marcel.’

‘What’s not going to work?’

I wave my hand at his Handsome Boy face. ‘That. I’m immune to your charms, remember?’

Marcel lifts his eyebrows as I have dared him. ‘Is that a challenge? Because I am warning you; you do not want to step into the ring with me.

I’ll crush you, Covey.’

He does not take his eyes off mine for several long seconds, and I can feel my smile fade and my cheeks heat up.

‘Come on, Lara Jean!’

I blink. Kitty. I had forgotten she was still in the room. I scramble to my feet.

‘Cue up the music. Marcel just challenged us to a dance-off.’

Kitty squeals and runs to turn on the speakers. I push back the coffee table.

We take our places in front of the fireplace, backs turned, heads down, hands clasped behind our backs.

When the bass kicks in, we jump and turn around. Hip thrust,

swivel, then move into- our knee slides. Then the running man, this moves Margot made up called the treadmill. The music stops, and Kitty and I freeze in our crunking positions- and then it- starts up again, and we are doing the butterfly, then back into the knee slides.

I forget- what the next move is so I sneak a peek at Kitty, who is shimmying and clapping her hands. Oh yes.

Our big finish is split, with our arms crossed for emphasis.

Marcel’s bowled over, laughing his head off. He claps and claps and stomps his feet.

When it is over, I try to catch my breath and manage to say, ‘Okay, you’re up.’

‘I can’t,’ Marcel gasps. ‘How do I follow a performance like that? Kitty, will you teach me that pop-and-lock move?’

Kitty gets shy suddenly. She sits on her hands and looks at him through her lashes and shakes her head.

‘Please, please?’ He asks.

Kitty finally caves in- I think she just wanted to make him work for it. I watch them dance all afternoon, my little sister the ninja and my pretend boyfriend Spider-Man.

First- I- laugh, but then a worrying thought comes out of nowhere- I cannot let Kitty get too attached to Marcel. This is temporary. The way Kitty looks at him, so adoringly, like he is her hero-.

When Marcel must leave, I walk him out to his car. Before he gets

in, I say, ‘I don’t think you should come over anymore. It’s confusing to Kitty.’

Frowning, he says, ‘How is it confusing to Kitty?’

‘Because - because when our - our thing is over, she’s going to miss you.’

‘I’ll still see the kid around.’ Marcel pokes me in the stomach. ‘I want joint custody.’

All I can think of is how patient he was with her, how sweet. Impulsively I get up on my tiptoes and

kiss him on the cheek, and he jerks back in surprise.

‘What was that for?’

My cheeks feel scalded. I say, ‘For being so nice to Kitty.’ Then I wave goodbye and I run into the house.

IF I DON’T BUY GROCERIES today, it is scrambled eggs for dinner tonight.

Again…

Margot’s car is fixed and sitting in the driveway, where it has been sitting for the past few weeks. I

could go to the store if I wanted to. I do want to. But I do not want to drive.

If I- was a nervous driver before, the accident has only made me worse. What business do I- have behind the wheel of a car? What if I hurt someone? What if I hurt Kitty?

They should not just give out driver's licenses so easily. I mean, a car is a dangerous thing. It is a weapon.

But the store is less than ten minutes away. It is not like I would be getting on the highway.

And I really- do not want to eat scrambled eggs for dinner tonight. Besides - if Marcel and Genevieve are getting back together, he will not be giving me rides anymore.

I must learn how to do it for myself. I cannot depend on other people to help me.

‘We’re going to the store, Kitty,’ I say.

She is lying down in front of the TV, propped up on her elbows. Her body looks so long; it is getting longer every day. Pretty soon she will be taller

than me. Kitty does not look away from the TV. ‘I don’t want to come. I want to watch my shows.’

‘If you come, I’ll let you pick out ice cream.’

Kitty gets to her feet.

On the drive there, I am going so slow that Kitty keeps telling me the speed limit. ‘They give tickets for going under the limit too, you know.’

‘Who told you that?’

‘No one. I just know it. I bet I’m going to be a better driver than you, Lara Jean.’

I grip the steering wheel tighter. ‘I bet you are.’ Brat. I bet when Kitty starts driving, she is going to be a speed demon without the slightest concern for those around her. But she will still probably be better at it than me. A reckless driver is better than a scared one; ask anybody.

‘I’m not scared of things like you are.’

I adjust my rearview mirror. ‘You sure are proud of yourself.’

‘I’m just saying.’

‘Is there a car coming? Can I switch lanes?’

Kitty turns her head. ‘You can go, but hurry.’

‘Like how much time do I have?’

‘It’s already too late. Wait - now you can go. Go!’

I jerk into the left lane and look in my rearview. ‘Good job, Kitty. You just keep being my second pair of eyes.’

As we push the cart around the store, I am thinking about the drive home and having to get behind the wheel again. My heart still races even as I am trying to decide if we should have zucchini or green beans with dinner. By the time we are in the dairy aisle, Kitty’s whining. ‘Can you hurry? I don’t want to miss my next show!’

To appease her, I say, ‘Go pick out ice cream,’ and Kitty heads off toward the frozen-food aisle.

The way home, I stay in the right lane for blocks and blocks- so I do not have to switch lanes.

The car in front of me is an old lady, and she is moving at a snail’s pace, which suits me simply fine. Kitty begs me to switch lanes, but I just ignore her and keep doing what I am doing, nice and easy. My hands are gripping the steering wheel so tightly my knuckles are white.

‘The ice cream’s going to be all melted by the time we get home,’ Kitty gripes.

-And-

‘I’ve missed every single one of my shows. Can you please go to the fast lane?’

‘Kitty!’ I screech. ‘Will you just let me drive?’

‘Then drive already!’

I lean across the console to cuff her upside the head, and she scoots closer to the window so I cannot reach

her. ‘Can’t touch me,’ she says gleefully.

‘Quit playing around and be my eyes,’ I say.

A car is coming up on my right, zooming off a highway exit. He is going to have to merge into my lane soon. Lightning-fast I look over my shoulder for my blind spot, to see if I can switch lanes. Every time I must take my eyes away from the road, even for a second, I feel so much panic in my chest. But I do not have a choice, I just hold my

breath and I switch over to the left lane. Nothing bad happens. I exhale.

My heart races the whole way home. But we make it, no accidents and nobody honking their horn at me, and that is the important thing. And the ice cream is fine, only a little melted on top. It will get easier each time, I think. I hope. I just must keep trying.

I cannot stand the thought of Kitty being scornful of me. I am her big sister. I must be someone she looks up to, the way I look up to Margot. How can Kitty look up to me if I am weak?

That night I pack Kitty is and my lunches. I make what Mommy used to make us sometimes when we went on picnics at the winery in Keswick. I dice up a carrot and an onion and fry it with sesame oil and a little vinegar; then I mix in sushi rice.

When it is- cooked, I scoop pats of rice into tofu skins. They are like rice balls in little purses.

I do not have an exact recipe to follow, but it tastes right enough. When I am finished, I get on a ladder and search for the bento boxes Mommy

used to put them in. I finally find them in the back of the Tupperware cabinet.

I do not know if Kitty will remember eating these rice balls, but I hope that her heart will.

AT THE LUNCH TABLE PETE Rand his friends cannot get enough of the rice balls. I only get to eat three. ‘These are so good,’ Marcel keeps saying. When he reaches for the last one, he stops short and quickly looks up at me to see if I noticed.

‘You can have it,’ I say. I know what he is thinking of. The last piece of pizza.

‘No, it’s all right, I’m good.’

‘Have it.’

‘I don’t want it!’

I pick up the rice ball with my fingers and put it in his face. ‘Say ‘ah.’ ‘Stubbornly he says, ‘No. I’m not going to give you the satisfaction of being right.’

Darrell hoots with laughter. ‘I’m jealous of you, I wish I had a girl to

feed me my lunch. Lara Jean, if he doesn't take it, I will.' He leans forward and- opens his mouth for me.

Marcel shoves him to the side and says, 'Step off, it's mine!' He opens his mouth and I pop it in like he is a seal at Sea World. With his mouth full of rice and his eyes closed, he says, 'Yum- yum- yum.'

I smile because it is so cute. And for a second, just for a second, I forget. I forget that this is not real.

Marcel swallows the food in his mouth and says, ‘What’s wrong? Why do you look sad?’

‘I’m not sad. I’m hungry because you guys ate my lunch.’ I cross my eyes at him to show him I am joking.

Immediately Marcel pushes out his chair and stands up. ‘I’m going to get you a sandwich.’

I grab his sleeve. ‘Don’t. I’m just kidding.’

‘Are you sure?’ I nod, and he sits back down. ‘If you’re hungry later, we can stop somewhere on the way home.’

‘About that,’ I say. ‘My car’s fixed now, so I won’t be needing you to give me rides anymore.’

‘Oh, really?’ Marcel leans back in his chair. ‘I don’t mind picking you up, though. I know you hate to drive.’

‘The only way I’ll get better is if I practice,’ I say, feeling like Margot.

Margot the- Good.

‘Besides, now you’ll get back your extra five minutes of sleep.’

Marcel grins. ‘True.’

VIRTUAL SUNDAY NIGHT DINNER WAS an idea I thought up.

I have my laptop propped up on a stack of books in the center of the table.

Daddy- and Kitty and I are all sitting in front of it with our slices of pizza. It is our lunchtime and Margot’s dinnertime. Margot’s sitting at her desk

with a salad. She is already in her flannel pjs.

‘You guys are eating pizza again?’ Margot gives me and Daddy a disapproving look.

‘Kitty’s going to stay tiny if you don’t feed her any green food.’

‘Relax, Gogo, there are peppers on this pizza,’ I say, holding up my slice, and everybody laughs.

‘There’ll be a spinach salad with dinner tonight,’ Daddy offers.

‘Can you make my spinach portion into a green juice instead?’ Kitty asks.

‘That’s the healthiest way to eat spinach.’

‘How do you know that?’ Margot asks.

‘From Marcel.’

The pizza slice that was halfway to my mouth freezes in midair.

‘Marcel who?’

‘Lara Jean’s boyfriend.’

‘Wait a minute - Lara Jean’s dating who?’ On the computer screen, Margot’s eyes are huge and incredulous.

‘Marcel-,’ Kitty chirps.

I whip my head around and give her a dirty look. With my eyes, I say, thanks for disclosing information, Kitty. With her eyes she says, What? You should have told her yourself ages ago.

Margot looks from Kitty to me. ‘What in the world? How did that happen?’

Lamely I say, ‘It just sort of - happened.’

‘Are you serious? Why would you ever be interested in someone like Marcel-?

He’s such a -’ Margot shakes her head in disbelief. ‘I mean, did you know Josh caught him cheating on a test once?’

‘Marcel cheats at school?’ Daddy repeats, alarmed.

I quickly look at him and say, ‘Once, in seventh grade! The seventh

grade does not even count anymore it is so long ago. And it was not a test, it was a quiz.'

'I don't think he's a good guy for you. All of those lacrosse guys are so douchey.'

'Well, Marcel's not like those other guys.' I do not understand why Margot cannot just be happy for me. I was at least pretend happy for her when she started dating Josh.

She could pretend happy for me too. And it makes me mad, the way

she is saying all this stuff in front of Daddy and Kitty.

'If you talk to him if you just give him a chance, you'll see, Margot.' I do not know why I am bothering trying to convince her of- Marcel when it will be over soon anyway. But I want her to know that he is a good guy because he is.

Margot makes a face like Yeah, okay, sure and I know she does not believe me. 'What about Genevieve?'

'They broke up months ago.'

Daddy looks confused and says, ‘Marcel and Genevieve were an item?’ ‘Never mind, Daddy,’ I say.

Margot is quiet, chewing on her salad, so I think she’s done, but then she says, ‘He’s not very smart, though, is he? I mean, at school?’

‘Not everybody can be a National Merit Scholar! And there are various kinds of intelligence, you know. He has a high emotional IQ.’ Margot’s disapproval makes me feel prickly all over. More than prickly. Mad.

What right does she have to weigh in when she does not even live here anymore?

Kitty has more of a right than she does.

‘Kitty, do you like Marcel?’ I ask her. I know she will say yes.

Kitty perks up, and I can tell she is pleased to be included in the big-girl talk.

‘Yes.’

Surprised, Margot says, ‘Kitty, you’ve spent time together with him too?’

‘Sure. He comes over all the time. He gives us rides.’

‘In his two-seater?’ Margot shoots a look at me.

Kitty pipes up. ‘No, in his mom’s van!’ With innocent eyes, she says, ‘I want to go for a ride in his convertible. I’ve never been in a convertible.’ ‘So, he doesn’t drive around his Audi anymore?’ Margot asks me.

‘Not when Kitty’s riding with us,’ I say.

‘Hmm’ is all Margot says, and the skeptical look on her face makes me want to x her right off the screen.

AFTER SCHOOL I GET A text from Josh.

You, me, and the diner-like old times.

Except old times would have included Margot. Now it is modern times, I suppose. That is not altogether a sad thing. New can be good.

OK but I am getting my own grilled cheese because you always hog more than your fair share.

Deal.

We are sitting in our booth by the jukebox.

I wonder what Margot's doing right now. It is nighttime in Scotland. She is getting ready to go out to the pub with her hallmates. Margot says pubs are big over there; they have what they call pub crawls, where they go from pub to pub and drink and drink.

Margot's not some big drinker, I have never even seen her drunk. I hope she is learned how to by now.

I hold my hand out for quarters. Another Lara Jean–and-Josh tradition. Josh always gives me quarters for the jukebox.

It is because he keeps mounds of them in his car for the tollbooth and- I never- have quarters because I hate change.

I cannot decide if I want doo-wop or folksy guitar, but then at the last second, I put in- 'Video Killed the

Radio Star,' for Margot. So, in a way, it is like she is here.

Josh smiles when it comes on. 'I knew you'd pick that.'

'No, you didn't, because I didn't know I was going to until I did.' I pick up my menu and study it like I have not seen it a million times.

Josh is still smiling. 'Why bother looking at the menu when we already know what you're going to get?'

‘I could change my mind at the last second,’ I say. ‘There’s a chance I could order a tuna melt or a turkey burger or a chef salad. I can be adventurous too, you know.’

‘Sure,’ Josh agrees, and I know he is just humoring me.

The server comes over to take our order and Josh says, ‘I’ll have a slice of grilled cheese and a tomato soup and a chocolate milkshake.’

He looks at me expectantly.

There is a smile coming up on the corners of his lips.

‘Ah-um -’ I scan the menu as fast as I can, but I do not want a tuna melt or a turkey burger or a chef salad. I give up. I like what I like. ‘A grilled cheese, please.

And a black-cherry soda.’ As soon as the server is gone, I say, ‘Don’t say a word.’

‘Oh, I wasn’t going to.’

And then, because there is a silence, we both speak at the same

time. I say, ‘Have you talked to Margot lately?’ and he says, ‘How are things going with-?’

Josh’s easy smile fades and he looks away. ‘Yeah, we chat online sometimes. I think. …I think she’s kind of homesick.’

I give him a funny look. ‘I just talked to her last night and she didn’t seem homesick at all. She seemed like the same old Margot. She was telling us about Raisin Weekend. It makes me want to go to Saint Andrew's too.’

‘What’s Raisin Weekend?’

‘I’m not a hundred percent sure - it sounds like it was a mix of drinking a lot and Latin. I guess it’s a Scottish thing.’

‘Would you do that?’ Josh asks. ‘Would you go somewhere far away?’

I sigh. ‘No, probably not. That is Margot, not me. It would be nice to visit, though. Maybe my dad will let me go during spring break.’

‘I think she’d like that a lot. Our Paris trip isn’t happening anymore, huh?’

He laughs awkwardly, and then he clears his throat. ‘So, wait, how are things going with-?’

Before I can answer, the server comes back with our food. Josh pushes the bowl of soup, so it is in the middle of the table. ‘The First sip?’ he asks, holding up the milkshake.

Eagerly I nod and lean across the table. Josh holds the glass and I take a long sip.

‘Ahn,’ I say, sitting back down.

‘That was a pretty big sip,’ he says. ‘How come you never get your own?’

‘Why should I when I know you’ll share?’ I break off a piece of grilled cheese and dip it into the soup.

‘So, you were saying?’ Josh prods. When I stare at him blankly, he says, ‘You were about to talk about-’

I was hoping this would not come up. I am not in the mood to tell more lies to Josh.

‘Things are good.’ Because Josh is looking at me like he is expecting something more, I add, ‘He’s really sweet.’

Josh snorts.

‘He’s not what you’d think. People are so quick to judge him, but he’s different.’

I am surprised to find I am telling the truth. Marcel is not what you would think. He is overconfident, and he can be obnoxious, and he is always late, true, but there are other good and surprising things about him too.

‘He’s - not what you think.’

Josh gives me a dubious look. Then he dunks half his sandwich into the soup and says, ‘You already said that.’

‘That’s because it’s true.’ He shrugs at this like he does not believe me. So, I say, ‘You should see the way Kitty acts around Marcel. She’s crazy about him.’ I do not realize it until the words are out of my mouth, but I say it to hurt him.

Josh tears off a hunk of grilled cheese. ‘Well, I hope she doesn’t get too attached.’

Even though I have had that same thought for varied reasons, it still hurts to hear.

Suddenly the easy Josh-and–Lara Jean feeling is lost. Josh is withdrawn and closed off, and I am stinging from what he said about Marcel, and it feels like playacting to sit across from each other and pretend it is the same as the old days. How

could it be when Margot is not here? She is the point of our little triangle.

'Hey,' Josh says suddenly. I look up. 'I didn't mean that. That was a shitty thing to say.' He ducks his head. 'I guess - I don't know, maybe I'm just jealous.

I'm not used to sharing the Song girls.'

I go soft inside. Now that he is said this wonderful thing, I am feeling warm and generous toward him again. I do not say what I am thinking, which is, you may not be used to sharing- us, but

we are very used to sharing you. ‘You know Kitty still loves you best,’ I say, which makes him smile.

‘I mean, I did teach her how to hock a loogie,’ Josh says. ‘You don’t forget the person who teaches you something like that.’ He takes a long sip of his milkshake.

‘Hey, they’re doing a Lord of the Rings marathon at the Bess this weekend. Want to go?’

Continued: 3

‘That’s like - nine hours!’

‘Yeah, nine hours of awesome.’

‘True,’ I agree. ‘I want to go; I just have to check with Marcel first. He said something about going to a movie this weekend, and-’ Josh cuts me off before I can finish. ‘It’s fine. I can just go with Mike. Or I will take Kitty. It’s about time I introduced her to the genius that is Tolkien.’

I am quiet. Are Kitty and I interchangeable in his mind? Are Margot and me?

We are sharing a waffle when Genevieve walks into the diner with a

little kid who I guess must be her little brother. Not her actual little brother; Gen is an only child. She is the president of the Little Sib program. It is where a high school student is paired up with an elementary school kid and you tutor them and take them out for fun days.

I slump down in my seat, but of course, Gen still sees me. She looks from me to Josh, and then she gives me a little wave. I do not know what to do so I just wave back.

Something about the way she is smiling at me is unsettling. It is how genuinely happy she looks.

If Genevieve is happy, that is not good for me.

At dinner, I get a text from Marcel. It says, If- you are going to hang out with Sanderson, can you at least not do it in public?

Under the table, I read it over and over. Could it be that Marcel's the teensiest bit jealous? Or is he just worried about how it looks to Genevieve?

‘What do you keep looking at?’ Kitty wants to know.

I put my phone down, face down. ‘Nothing.’

Kitty turns to Daddy and says, ‘I bet it was a text from Marcel.’

Buttering a roll, my dad says, ‘I like Marcel.’

‘You do?’ I speak.

Daddy nods. ‘He’s a good kid. He’s taken with you, Lara Jean.’

‘Taken with me?’ I repeat.

To me, Kitty says, ‘You sound like a parrot.’ To Daddy she says, ‘What does that mean? Taken by her?’

‘It means he’s charmed by her,’ Daddy explains. ‘He’s smitten.’

‘Well, what’s smitten?’

He chuckles and stuffs the roll in Kitty’s open, perplexed mouth. ‘It means he likes her.’

‘He likes her,’ Kitty agrees, her mouth full. ‘He- he looks at you a lot, Lara Jean. When you are not paying

attention. He looks at you, to see if you're having an enjoyable time.'

'He does?' My chest feels warm and glow, and I can feel myself start to smile.

'I'm simply happy to see you so happy. I used to worry about Margot taking on so many responsibilities at home and helping the way she did. I did not want her to miss her high school experience. But you know Margot. She's so driven.' Daddy reaches over and squeezes my shoulder. 'To see you now, going out and doing things and

making new friends - it makes your old man incredibly happy. Incredibly happy.'

I feel a lump grow in my throat. If only it was not all a lie.

'Don't cry, Daddy,' Kitty orders, and Daddy nods and pulls her into his arms for a hug.

'Can you do me a favor, Kitty?' He speaks.

'What?'

'Can you stay this age forever?'

Automatically Kitty replies, ‘I can if you give me a puppy.’

My dad roars with laughter, and Kitty laughs too.

I admire my little sister sometimes. She knows exactly what she wants, and she will do whatever it takes to get it. She is shameless that way.

I am going to talk to Daddy and help her cause. The two of us will wear him down.

There will be a puppy under our tree Christmas morning. I had bet money on it.

THE NEXT NIGHT Marcel AND I study at Starbucks for a few hours- well, I study, and he keeps getting up and talking to people from school. On the way home, he asks, ‘Did you sign up for the ski trip?’

‘No. I’m a terrible skier.’ Only cool people like Marcel and his friends go on the ski trip.

I could try to twist Chris’s arm into going, but she would laugh in my

face. She is not going on any school trip.

'You don't have to ski. You can snowboard. That's what I'm doing.'

I give him a look. 'Can you picture me snowboarding?'

'I'll teach you. Come on, it'll be fun.' Marcel grabs my hand and says, 'Please- please- please, Lara Jean? Come on, be a sport. It'll be fun, I promise.'

He catches me by surprise with this. The ski trip is not until winter

break. So, he wants to keep this, us, up until then. For some reason, I feel relieved.

'If you don't want to snowboard,' he continues, 'the lodge has a big stone fireplace and big comfortable chairs. You can sit and read for hours. And they sell the best hot chocolate.

I'll buy you one.' He squeezes my hand.

My heart does a little zing, and I say, 'All right, I'll go. But the hot

chocolate had better be as good as you say.'

'I'll buy you as many as you want.'

'Then you better bring a lot of singles,' I say, and Marcel snorts. 'What?'

'Nothing.'

When we get to my house, I climb out and he drives away before it occurs to me, I left my bag on the floor of his car, and Daddy and Kitty are not home.

They are at- Kitty is the school for parent-teacher conferences.

I fumble around blindly under the deck, feeling around in the dark for the spare keys- we keep hidden under the wheelbarrow. Then I remember that the spare keys are in the junk drawer, in the house, because I forgot to put them back the last time I got locked out.

I have no keys, no phone, no way of getting into the house.

Josh! Josh has a spare key. He is watered my dad’s plants for him a

few times when we went away on vacation.

I find a rock in the driveway, and I cross the lawn and stand underneath Josh’s window.

I throw the rock at it, and I miss it. I find another one, and it pings off the glass, barely making a sound. I try again, with a bigger rock. This one hits.

Josh opens the window and leans his head out. ‘Hey. Did - leave already?’

Surprised, I say, ‘Yeah. I left my bag in his car. Can you throw down the spare keys?’

Josh sighs like I am asking for something huge. ‘Hold on.’ Then he disappears.

I stand there and wait for him to come back to the window, but he does not.

He comes out of the front door instead. He is wearing a- hoodie and sweatpants.

It is- Margot's favorite hoodie. When they first got together, she used to wear it all the time, like it was a letterman's jacket or something.

I hold my hand out for the keys and Josh drops them in my hand. 'Thanks, Joshy.'

I turn to leave, but he says, 'Wait. I'm worried about you.'

'What? Why?'

He sighs heavily and adjusts his glasses. He only wears his glasses at night.

‘This thing with-’

‘Not that again, Josh-’

‘He’s a player. He is not good enough for you. You are - innocent. You are not like other girls. He is a typical guy. You can’t trust him.’

‘I know him a lot better than you do.’

‘I’m just looking out for you.’ Josh clears his throat. ‘You’re like my little sister.’

I want to hit him for saying that. ‘No, I’m not,’ I say.

An uneasy look crosses over Josh's face. I know what he is thinking because we are both thinking it.

Then, headlights are beaming down our street. It is Marcel's car. He has come back. I hand Josh his set of keys and run over to my driveway. Over my shoulder, I call out, 'Thanks, Joshy!'

I come around the front to the driver's side. Marcel's window is down. 'You forgot your bag,' he says, glancing over toward Josh's house.

'I know,' I say breathlessly. 'Thanks for coming back.'

‘Is he out there?’

‘I don’t know. He was a minute ago.’

‘Then just in case,’ Marcel says, and he leans his head out and kisses me on the lips, open-mouthed and sure.

I am stunned.

When he pulls away, Marcel’s smiling. ‘Night, Lara Jean.’

He drives off into the night and I am still standing there with my fingers to my lips.

Marcel - just kissed me. He kissed me, and I liked it. I am sure I liked it. I am sure I like him.

The next morning, I am at my locker, putting my books away when I see- Marcel walking down the hallway. My heart thumps in my chest so loud I can hear it echo in my ears. He has not seen me yet. I duck my head into my locker and start arranging my books into a pile. From behind the locked door, he says, ‘Hey.’ ‘Hey,’ I say back.

‘I just want to set your mind at ease, Covey. I’m not going to kiss you again, so don’t worry about it.’

Oh. …?...

So that is that. It does not matter if I like him or not because he does not like me back.

It is silly to feel so disappointed about something you only just realized you wanted, isn’t it?

Do not let him see that you are disappointed.

I face him. ‘I wasn’t worried about it.’

‘Yes- you were. Look at you: your face is all pinched together like a clam.’

Marcel-

laughs, and I try to un-pinch my face, to look serene. ‘It’s not going to happen again. It was all for Sanderson’s benefit.’

‘Good.’

‘Good,’ he says, and he takes my hand, and he closes my locker door,

and he walks me to class like a real boyfriend like we are really in love.

How was I supposed to know what is real and what is not? It feels like I am the only one who does not know the difference.

MY DAD'S THRILLED WHEN ask him to sign the permission slip. 'Oh, Lara Jean, this is- great.

Did Marcel convince you? You've feared skiing ever since you were ten and you did the splits, and you couldn't get back up!'

‘Yeah, I remember.’ My boots froze onto the skis, and I lay there in the splits for what felt like days.

Signing the paper, my dad says, ‘Hey, maybe we can all of us go to Wintergreen over- Christmas. Marcel too.’

So that is where I get it from. My dad. He lives in a fantasy world. Handing me the slip, he says cheerfully, ‘You can wear Margot’s ski pants. Her gloves, too.’

I do not tell him that I will not need them because I will be cozy in the

lodge reading and sipping hot cocoa by the fire. I should bring my knitting stuff with me too.

When I talk to Margot on the phone that night, I tell her I am going on the ski trip, and she is surprised. ‘But you hate skiing.’

‘I’m going to try out snowboarding.’

‘Just - be careful,’ she says.

I am thinking she means on the slopes, but when Chris comes over the next night to borrow a dress, I learn

otherwise. ‘You know everybody hooks up on the ski trip, right?

It’s like a school-sanctioned booty call.’

‘What?’

‘That’s where I lost my V freshman year.’ ‘I thought you lost it in the woods near your house.’

‘Oh yes. Whatever, the point is, I had sex on the ski trip.’

‘There are chaperones,’ I say worriedly. ‘How can people just have sex with chaperones around?’

‘Chaperones go to sleep early because they’re old,’ Chris says. ‘People just sneak out.

Plus- there is a hot tub. Did you know that there’s a hot tub?’

‘No - Marcel never mentioned that.’ Well, that is that I just will not pack a bathing suit.

It is not like they can make you go in a hot tub if you do not want to.

‘The year I went, people were skinny-dipping.’

My eyes bug out. Skinny-dipping! ‘People were nude?’

‘Well, the girls took their tops off. Just be prepared.’ Chris chews on her fingernail.

‘Last year I heard Mr. Dunham got in the hot tub with students and it was weird.’

‘This sounds like the Wild West,’ I mutter.

‘More like Girls Gone Wild.’

It’s not that I am worried Marcel will try something with me. I

know he will not because he doesn’t see me that way. But are people going to expect it? Am I going to have to sneak into his room in the middle of the night, so people think we are doing something? I do not want to get in trouble on a school trip, but Marcel has a way of convincing me to do stuff I do not want to do.

I grab Chris’s hands. ‘Will you please come? Please, please!’

She shakes her head. ‘You know better than that. I don’t do school trips.’

‘You have before!’

‘Yeah, freshman year. Not anymore.’

‘But I need you!’ Desperately I squeeze her hands and say, ‘Remember how I covered for you last year when you went to Coachella? I spent the whole weekend sneaking in and out of your house so your mom would think you were at home! Do not forget the things I have done for you, Chris! I need you now!’

Unmoved, Chris plucks her hands away from mine and goes to the

mirror and starts examining her skin. ‘Um-’s not going to pressure you to have sex if you do not want to.

If you minus the fact that he dated the devil, he is not a total dummy. He’s kind of decent, actually.’

‘What do you mean by decent? Decent like he doesn’t care that much about sex?’

‘Oh, God, no. He and Gen were in constant heat for each other. She has been on the pill.

longer than I have. Too bad everyone in my family thinks she's this angel.'

Chris pokes at- a zit on her chin. 'What a fake. I should send an anonymous letter to our grandma - Not that I really would. I am no rat, unlike her. Remember that time she told our grandma I was going to school drunk?' She does not wait for me to answer. When Chris gets going on a Genevieve rant, she is single-minded. 'My grandma wanted to use the money she saved for my college for rehab! They

had a family meeting with me! I'm so glad you stole - from her.'

'I didn't steal him. They were already broken up!'

Chris snorts. 'Sure, keep telling that to yourself. Gen's going on the ski trip, you know.

She is class president, so she is organizing it. So just beware. Don't ever ski alone.'

I let out a gasp. 'Chris, I'm begging you. Please come.' In a burst of inspiration, I say, 'If you come, it'll

make Genevieve mad! She is organizing this whole thing; it is her trip. She won't want you there!'

Chris purses her lips into a smile. 'You know how to play me.' She juts her chin at me.

'Do you think this zit is ready to pop?'

THANKSGIVING DAY, DADDY CLEANS OUT the turkey for me and then leaves to go pick up our Korean grandma, who lives an hour away in a retirement community with a lot of other Korean grandmas. Daddy's mom,

Nana, is spending Thanksgiving with her boyfriend's family, which is fine by me because I know she would not have anything nice to say about the food.

I make up a green-bean dish with orange peel and dill, in an earnest effort to be jazzy and inventive. I nominate Kitty to be my taste tester and she takes a bite of green bean and says it tastes like an orange pickle. 'Why can't we just have a green-bean casserole with the fried onion rings that come in the can?' Kitty ponders. She is

cutting out different colored feathers for her turkey placemats.

‘Because I’m trying to be jazzy and inventive,’ I say, dumping a can of gravy into the saucepan.

Doubtfully Kitty says, ‘Well, are we still having broccoli casserole? People will eat that.’

‘Do you see any broccoli anywhere in this kitchen?’ I ask. ‘No, the green in this meal is the green bean.’

‘What about mashed potatoes? We’re still having mashed potatoes, right?’

Mashed potatoes. I jump up and check the pantry. I forgot to buy potatoes. I got the whole milk and the butter and even the chives to put on top like Margot always does.

But I forgot the actual potatoes. ‘Call Daddy and ask him to pick up Yukon gold potatoes on the way home,’ I say, closing the pantry door.

‘I can’t believe you forgot the potatoes,’ Kitty says with a shake of her head.

I glare at her. ‘Just focus on your placemats.’

‘No, because if I didn’t just ask about the mashed potatoes, the meal would have been ruined, so you should be thanking me.’

Kitty gets up to call Daddy, and I yell out, ‘Those turkeys look more like the NBC peacock logo than actual turkeys, so!’

Kitty is unfazed, and I take another bite of the green beans. They do taste like an orange pickle.

It turns out I have cooked the turkey upside down. Also, Kitty kept hounding me about salmonella because- she watched a video on it in science, so I wind up leaving the bird in too long. The mashed potatoes are fine, but there are some crunchy bits here and there because I rushed to boil them.

We are seated around the dining room table, and Kitty's placemats do add a certain something.

Grandma is eating a whole pile of green beans, and I shoot Kitty a triumphant look.

See? Someone likes them.

There was a minute or two after Mommy died when Grandma moved in to help take care of us. There was even talk of her staying. She did not think Daddy could manage on his own.

‘So, Danny,’ Grandma begins. Kitty and I exchange a look across the table because we know what is coming. ‘Are you seeing anyone these days? Going on dates?’

My dad reddens. ‘Er - not so much. My work keeps me so busy-’ Grandma clucks. ‘It’s not good for a man to be alone, Danny.’

‘I’ve got my girls to keep me company,’ my dad says, trying to sound jovial and not tense.

Grandma fixes him with a cold stare. ‘That’s not what I mean.’

When we are doing the dishes, Grandma asks me, ‘Lara Jean, would you mind if your daddy had a girlfriend?’

It is something Margot and I have discussed at length over the years, most often in the dark, late at night. If Daddy ad to date, what kind of woman would we like to see him with? Someone with a good sense of humor, kindhearted, all the usual things. Someone who would be firm with Kitty but not rein her in so much that it

would squash all the special things about her.

But also- someone who would not try to be our mother; that is what Margot is fiercest about. Kitty needs a mom, but we are old enough to not need mothering, she says. Of the three of us, Margot would be the most critical. She is incredibly loyal to Mommy's memory. Not that I am I am not, but there have been times, over the years, where I have, I have thought about how it would be nice to have someone. Someone older, a lady, who

knows about certain things, like the right way to put on blush, or how to flirt to get out of a speeding ticket.

Things to know for the future. But then it never happened. Daddy's been on some dates, but he has not had a steady girlfriend he is brought around. Which has always been sort of a relief, but now that I am getting older, I keep thinking about what it will be like when I am gone and it is just Kitty and Daddy, and then before long it will just be Daddy. Ido not do not want him to be alone.

‘No,’ I say. ‘I wouldn’t mind at all.’

Grandma gives me an approving look. ‘Good girl,’ she says, and I feel warm and cozy inside, like how I used to feel after a cup of the Night-Night Tea Mommy used to make me- when I could not fall asleep at night. Daddies made it for me a few times since, but it never tasted the same, and I never had the heart to tell him.

THE CHRISTMAS COOKIE JACKPOT START December first. We

drag out all of Mommy's old cookbooks and cooking magazines and we spread them out on the living room floor and turn on the Jack Brown Christmas album. No Christmas music is- allowed in our house until December first. I do not remember whose rule this is, but we abide by it. Kitty keeps a list of which cookies we are doing and which ones we are doing.

There are a few perennials. My dad loves pecan crescents, so those are necessary.

Sugar cookies because those are a given. Snickerdoodles for Kitty, molasses cookies for Margot, cowgirl cookies for me. White-chocolate cranberry is Josh's favorite. I think this year, though, we should mix things up and do different cookies. Not entirely, but at least a few new ones. Marcel's here; he stopped by after school to work on chem, and now it is hours later, and he is still here. He and Kitty and I are in the living room going through the cookbooks. My dads in the kitchen listening to NPR and making tomorrow's lunches.

‘Please no more turkey sandwiches,’ I call out. Marcel nudges my sock and mouths spoiled, and he points at me and Kitty, shaking his finger at us. ‘Whatever. Your mom makes your lunches every day, so shut it,’ I whisper.

My dad calls back, ‘Hey, I’m sick of leftovers too, but what are we going to do? Throw it away?’

Kitty and I look at each other. ‘Exactly,’ I say. My dad has a thing about wasting food. I wonder if I snuck down to the kitchen tonight and threw

it out if he would notice. He would. ‘If we had a dog,’ Kitty pipes up loudly, ‘there wouldn’t be any more leftovers.’ She winks at me. ‘What kind of dog do you want?’ Marcel asks her. ‘Don’t get her hopes up,’ I tell him, but he waves me off. Immediately Kitty says, ‘An Akita. Red fur with a cinnamon-bun tail. Or a German shepherd I can train to be a seeing-eye dog.’

‘But you’re not blind,’ Marcel says.

‘But I could be one day.’ Grinning, Marcel shakes his head. He

nudges me again and in an admiring voice, he says, ‘Can’t argue with the kid.’ ‘It’s futile,’ I agree. I hold up a magazine to show Kitty. ‘What do you think? Creams Icle cookies?’ Kitty writes them down as a maybe.

‘Hey, what about these?’ Marcel pushes a cookbook in my lap. It is opened to a fruitcake cookie recipe. I gag. ‘Are you kidding? You are kidding, right? Fruitcake cookies? That’s disgusting.’

‘When done right, fruitcake can be really good,’ Marcel defends. ‘My

great-aunt Trish used to make fruitcake, and she'd put ice cream on top and it was awesome.' 'If you put ice cream on anything, it's good,' Kitty says.

'Can't argue with the kid,' I say, and Marcel and I exchange smiles over Kitty's head. 'Point taken, but this isn't your average fruitcake. It is not, like, a wet loaf of neon jujubes. It has pecans and dried cherries and blueberries and good stuff. She called it Christmas Memory fruitcake.'

‘I love that story!’ I exclaim. ‘That’s my favorite. It’s so good but so sad.’

Marcel looks puzzled and so does Kitty, so I explain. ‘‘A Christmas Memory’ is a short story by Truman Capote. It is about a boy named Buddy and his older lady cousin who took care of him when he was little. They’d save up all year to buy ingredients for fruitcake and then they’d send them as presents to friends, but also to, like, the president.’

‘Why is it so sad?’ Kitty wants to know.

‘Because they are best friends and they love each other more than anybody, but they get separated in the end, because the family thinks she doesn’t take good enough care of him. And she does not, but it does not matter because she was still his soul mate. In the end, she dies, and Buddy does not even get to say goodbye to her. And it’s a true story.’

‘That’s depressing,’ Marcel says. ‘Forget the fruitcake cookies.’

Kitty crosses out fruitcake cookies on her pad.

I am thumbing through an old Good Housekeeping magazine when the doorbell rings.

Kitty scrambles up and runs for the door. ‘Check who it is before you open it,’ I call after her. She is always forgetting to check first.

‘Josh!’ I hear her squeal.

Marcel’s head jerks up.

‘He’s here to see Kitty,’ I tell him.

‘Yeah, right.’

Josh walks into the living room with Kitty hanging around his neck like a monkey.

‘Hey,’ he says, eyes flickering in Marcel’s direction.

‘What’s up, man,’ Marcel says, friendly as can be. ‘Have a seat.’

I give him a strange look. Just a second ago he was complaining, and now he is happy as a clam. I do not get boys.

Josh holds up a plastic bag. ‘I brought back your casserole dish.’

‘Is that Josh?’ my dad calls from the kitchen. ‘Josh, do you want a snack? Turkey sandwich?’

I am positive he is going to say no because I am sure he has had as many leftover turkey sandwiches over at his house as we have been eating over here, but then he goes, ‘Sure!’

Josh disentangles himself from Kitty and plops down on the couch. To me he says,

‘Christmas Cookie Bonanza?’

‘Christmas Cookie Bonanza,’ I confirm.

‘You’re making my favorite, right?’ Josh gives me puppy-dog eyes, which always makes me laugh because it is so un-Josh.

‘You’re such a dork,’ I say, shaking my head.

‘What’s your favorite?’ Marcel asks him. ‘Because the list is pretty set.’

‘I’m fairly sure it’s already on the list,’ Josh says.

I look from Josh to Marcel. I cannot tell if they are kidding or not.

Marcel reaches out and tickles Kitty’s feet. ‘Read us the list, Katherine.’

Kitty giggles and rolls over to her notepad. Then she stands up and grandly says, ‘M&M cookies are a yes, cappuccino cookies are a maybe, creamily cookies are a maybe, fruitcake cookies are a no way-’

‘Wait a minute, I’m a part of this council too,’ Marcel objects, ‘and you guys just turned down my fruitcake cookies without a second thought.’

‘You said to forget the fruitcake cookies, like, five seconds ago!’ I speak.

‘Well, now I want them back under consideration,’ he says.

‘I’m sorry, but you don’t have the votes,’ I tell him. ‘Kellie and I both vote no, so that’s two against one.’ My dad pops his head into the living room. ‘Put me down as a yes vote for the fruitcake cookies.’ His head disappears

back into the kitchen. ‘Thank you, Dr. Berson’ Marcel crows. He drags me closer to him. ‘See, I knew your dad was on my side.’ I laugh. ‘You’re such a suck-up!’ And then I look over at Josh, and he is staring at us with a funny, left out look on his face. It makes me feel bad, that look. I scoot away from Marcel and start flipping through my books again. I tell him, ‘The list is still a work in progress. The cookie council will strongly consider your white-chocolate cranberry cookies.’

‘Greatly appreciated,’ Ray says. ‘Christmas isn’t Christmas without your chocolate Kiss cookies.’ Kitty pipes up, ‘Hey, Honey, you’re a suck-up too.’ He grabs her and tickles her until she is laughing so hard, she has tears in her eyes.

After Ray leaves and Kellie goes upstairs to watch TV, I am tidying up the living room and Ray sprawled out on the couch watching me. I keep thinking he is about to leave, but then he keeps lingering. Out of nowhere, he says, ‘Remember back at Halloween

how you where Marcel and Karly went. I bet you that was not a coincidence. I am a freeze. ‘No, he isn’t. He loves my sister. He always has and he always will.’ Ray waves this off. ‘Just you wait. As soon as you and I are done, he is going to pull some cheesy asses move and, like, profess his love for you with a boom box. I’m telling you; I know how guys think.’

Continued: 4

(Past)

Kellie- I yank away the pillow he has cushioning his back and put it

on the recliner. ‘My sister will be home for winter break soon. I bet you a million dollars they get back together.’ Ray holds his hand out for me to shake on it, and when I take it, he pulls me onto the couch next to him. They suck face legs touching and spared out and shit. He has a mischievous glint in his eye, and he is going to kiss me here and there, and I am scared, but I am excited, too. Footsteps coming down the stairs, and the moment’s over. ‘CAN WE PUT UP THE TREE this weekend?’ Kellie asks at breakfast.

My and her dad looks up from his bowl of oatmeal. Oatmeal, ugh. ‘I don’t see why not.’ Unenthusiastically I say, ‘Margot might be mad if we do it without her.’ Truth be told, I want to put up the tree too. It is so cozy to do Christmas Cookie Windfall and have the lights twinkling on the tree and Christmas music and the whole house smelling like sugar and butter. ‘Our family put their tree up the day after Thanksgiving,’ Killie says. ‘Let us just do it, then,’ I say. ‘Can we, Daddy?’ ‘Well, if Barn’s family is doing it,’ Daddy says. We drive out to the

Christmas tree farm an hour away, because that is where the nice ones are. Kellie insists on seeing every tree to make sure ours is the nicest one-dad-a.

I vote for a plump balsam fir because it smells the best, but Kellie does not think it is tall enough. We go for a Douglas fir instead, and the whole drive home the air smells like Christmas morning. Karly and Marcel who stayed overruns out of his house when he sees us struggling to get the tree inside. He and my dad heft it up

and take it inside the house. He holds the tree up straight as my dad screws the

Christmas tree stands around it tightly. I have a feeling like he is going to want to stay and help decorate the tree. I cannot stop thinking you said Ray said on the phone to me.

How I would like to get over them and we can do things. ‘A miniature to the left,’ Kellie directs. ‘It’s not straight enough.’ I bring down the box with the twinkle lights and the

ornaments and start sorting through them.

My favorite is the painted blue star I made in kindergarten out of dough. It is my favorite because there is a bite taken out of it, I told Kitty it was a cookie and she chomped right into it like the Cookie Monster. And then she cried, and I got in trouble, but it was worth it. ‘Should we do colored lights or white lights this year?’ I ask.

Where is,’ sis says. ‘But colored lights are fanciful,’ Marcel argues. ‘I mean, they’re sentimental.’ I Kellie roll

my eyes, to the goo- goo bull shit. ‘Fanciful, Marcel?’ And then Josh proceeds to make a case for colored lights, and he and I argue back and forth until Daddy intercedes and says we should just do half and half. This is when things finally feel truly normal between us, now that we are bickering again like old times.

Marcel was wrong about Ray. I feel that in my heart of hearts. The tree is so tall it nearly touches the ceiling. We run out of lights, so Daddy goes to buy more at the store. Marcel puts

Karly on his shoulders so she can put the angel on the tippy top seven or more feet or so- up.

'I'm glad we got a big tree this year,' I say with a happy sigh, falling back onto the sofa, spring jabbing me in the ass as I look up at the top. There is nothing cozier than a Christmas tree all lit up. A little later, Daddy must go into the market in town the only place open, and Kellie goes over to our neighbor's, so we can have our time. Get out of the House because they're

making s' love next to the fireplace, so it's just them and me leaving then?

I go to Ray- I am putting ornament hooks back into their different zip lock bags and Ray is loading up a cardboard box with the ornaments we did not have room for. He hoists the box in harams and knocks into a branch on the tree, and a glass ornament slips off and breaks.

Ray whimpers. 'Ray-ie,' I say. 'I made that in home-ie.' 'Sorry.' 'It's okay, it wasn't my best work anyway. I put in too many feathers.' It is a

transparent glass ball with white feathers and white sequins inside. I get a broom, and when I come back, he says, ‘You act differently around the baby. Did you know that?’ I look up from sweeping the broken ornament. ‘No- I don’t.’ ‘You don’t act like you. You act like - like how all girls act around him.

That is not you, Kill.’ I am somewhat annoyed, I say it nicely, ‘I act the same as I always do. What would you know about it, Ray? His mom is a dick and dad a pussy, they just fit in

will and I get fucked over; you've barely ever even been around us.' I crouch down and pick up a shard of glass. 'Be careful,' Ray says. 'Here, I'll do it.' He stoops down next to me and reaches for another shard. 'Owl is looking at me I said looking at the tree it like the sister loves so!'

'You be careful!' I lean close to him and try to get a closer look at his finger. 'Are you bleeding?' He shakes his head. 'I'm fine.' And then he says, 'You know what I don't get?'

'What the…?'

Ray stares at me, his cheeks a dull red. ‘Why you never said anything. If all that time you felt like that about me, why didn’t you say anything?’ My whole body goes stiff. I was not expecting that. I am not prepared. I swallow hard and say, ‘You were with Margot.’

‘I wasn’t always with Margot. The stuff you wrote- you liked me before I ever liked her. Why didn’t you just tell me?’ I let out a breath. ‘What does that even matter now?’ ‘It matters. You should have told me. You

should have at least given me a chance.' 'It wouldn't have made a difference, Ray!' 'And I'm telling you it would have!' He steps toward me. He- I rise to my feet as he holds me up.

Why is he mentioning this now, just when things are back to normal again?

'You're so full of it I say yet I love that about you. You've never thought of me that way, not ever, so don't go trying to reinvent history now when I have somebody.' 'Don't tell me what I think,' he shouts. 'You don't

know my every thought, of my sis.'

'Yes, I do. I know you better than anyone. You know why?

You are predictable. Everything you do. It is so predictable. The only reason you are even saying this now is because you are jealous. And it is not even because of me. You do not care about who I am with.

Ray said- You are just jealous that she took your spot, before now… You liked her better than me now… fuck no! You are the one baby- you are the one I want to feel and hold and fuck

hard. His face looks worried. He glares at me, and I glare back. ‘Fine!’ he yells be that way. ‘I’m jealous! Are you happy now?’ I do her instead- how about that, and then he jerks his head toward mine, and he kisses me. On the lips. His eyes are closed, mine are wide open. And then mine close too, and for a second, just for a second, I kiss him back. Then I break away. I push him off. We have a crazy love going on.

Victoriously he says, ‘Did you predict that, for Karly?’ My mouth opens and closes, but no words come

out. I drop the broom and run up the stairs, as fast as I can. I run to my room and lock my door behind me. Ray just kissed me. In my living room. My sister is coming back in a few weeks. And I have a fake boyfriend I just cheated on.

AFTER the THIRD PERIOD, Marcel IS waiting for me. He is wearing a skinny tie today with a V-neck and he has a full-size bag of cheese-it is in his hand. He stuffs a handful of Cheetos into his mouth, and orange dust floats onto his white and yellow bottom down. The corners of his mouth look slightly

orange too. With his mouth full he says, ‘Look, there’s something I need to tell you.’ I laugh. ‘I can’t believe I ever thought you were so refined,’ I say, blowing cheez-it- its powder off his shirt.

‘What do you need to tell me?’ I ask. I steal a few Cheese-it is out of the bag. When he shall, I say, ‘Lucas, I hate when people say that they have something to tell you and they don’t just say it. It’s like when people say they have a funny story- like, just hurry up and tell the story and I’ll decide for

myself if I think it's funny or not.' I lick' cheese off his lips. 'Well, you know I live in the same neighborhood as the city, right?' I nod. 'Last night I saw Olivia leaving her house, she was on her today, Maddie and she fights over nothing like always.'

'Oh.' That is all I say. Marcel 'oh.' 'Typically, I wouldn't think it was that big of a deal, but there's one other thing.' Marcel wipes his mouth off with the back of his hand. 'Genevieve and her college guy broke up over the

weekend. You know what that means, right?'

I am nodding but I am numb inside. 'Naturally, wait, what?' Marcel gives me a look that is half pitying, half impatient. 'She's going to try to get I back, on him!'

'Right,' I say, and I feel a pang even as I am saying it. 'Of course- she will.' 'Don't let her,' he warns. 'I won't,' I say, and the words come out soft like jam, without any conviction at all. I did not know it until now, but I think I have

been counting down to this moment all along.

For an oak view to want hell. For I figure out this whole thing has been a zany little detour and now it is time for him to go back where he belongs. To the person, he belongs to passed and now it belongs to no one for I know.

I was not planning to tell Marcel a thing about Kellie kissing me, Ray. I was not. But then, as Ray and I are walking together in school again, I see him and Genevieve walking down

the hallway. Ray gives me a meaningful look, which I pretend not to see. In chemistry class, I write both a note. Seeing which, one would go farthest and comeback with I want you baby or love you. You were right about Ray. Maddie said. I tap him on the back and slip the note in his hand. When he reads it, he sits up straight and immediately scribbles something back. Yet it was not what I wanted, I see Marcel in the hills, I walk up and he- He kissed me.

I write about him- and not the other one.

~*~

When Ray strengthens, I am ashamed to say that I feel a little bit vindicated.

I wait for him to write back, but he does not. As soon as the bell rings, he turns around and says, ‘What the hell? How did that even happen?’ ‘He came over to help us trim the tree.’ ‘And then what? He kissed her in front of me, my sis?’

‘Nope, not at all! It was just the two of us at the house.’

~*~

Marcel looks irritated at this like never- ever before, and I am starting to regret mentioning it. ‘What is he thinking, kissing my girlfriend? It is fucking silly. I’m going to say something to him.’ ‘Hold your shit, what? No!’ ‘I have to, Olivia. He can’t just get away with it… can he?’ I stand up and start packing up my bag. ‘You’d better not say anything to him, Ray- I mean it.’ Stop fooling around. Jay

watches me like a ghost eye going through me- feeling me from the inside and out, like a dick in a vagina feels the climaxing. And then he asks,

‘Did you kiss him back?’ ‘What does it matter? If I did- or didn’t?’ He looks taken back. ‘Are you madding at me for something?’ ‘No,’ I say. ‘But I will be if you say anything to Ray.’ ‘Fine,’ he says with a deadpanning berth. ‘Fine,’ I say back.

#- Hashtag: (Who needs boys, or go with a girl it is easier)

part: 8

Hold out your Tongue…

I HAVEN’T SEEN Ray kissed me as Marcel does, but when I get home that night from studying at the library, I see the old book for the old one, I sit there and he rubs my leg and up parts of me in-between the girlie heart-shaped of non-shaved hairy-ness, and the poop-shoot. Why…? Why… did God put the snack bar so close to the bathroom, (he grabs at her goodies, Ray said. ‘-Nice!’ The boy over yonder said- Nice! Looking like get some of that! He is sitting next to me a navy

top, waiting for me to move to his hand. The bell rings out and I want to shout it out. (What a way to beat around the bush… I thought. He- he.)

~*~

The lights are on, but you are not there, your mind is not your own, going must face it you addicted to love. In the house, my dad is home. Killie bedroom light is on doing the nasties like always now. God, even I am not that horned up…

Cut- aw-ah- her face made a look of something I can put into words-

the door bangs as she runs and calls me a creeper! Moving on to my room, I think about doing what she is… ah, not- IDK- yet I may get on the cam and chat. Do not know yet not. HI boy- HI! It is ME!!!! LOVES! DID YOU ALL MISS ME- MAH-KISS! The kiss was blown to all the viewers with eyes on the screen and one hand on the mouse and the other you can guess for yourself. Now- I like this one- I singing aloud for my baby boys now: I am selling records…

What is it that you do? Sitting in your mama's basement with a

shiatsu, Peanut butter on your dick, your right hand going click, while the dog is giving you a rim job! You are nothing but a WANNA BE! I would rather go on avoiding Ray, but here he is, at my house. ‘Hey,’ he says. ‘Can I talk to you?’ I sit down next to him and look straight ahead, across the street. Ms. McChild’s put her Christmas tree up too. She always puts it by the window near the door so people can see it from the outside. ‘We have to figure out what we’re going to do before Margot gets here. It was my responsibility for what happened. I

should be the one to tell her.' I stare at him in doubt. 'Tell her? Are you nuts-o? We're never telling Maggie because there's nothing to tell her she is just out of the click of teen life.'

He puts his chin out. 'I don't want to keep a secret from her.' 'You should have thought of that before you kissed me!' I hiss. 'And for the record, if anybody were going to tell her, it would be me. I am her sister. You were just her boyfriend. And you are not even that to any further extent, so…' Snow flashes across his face and it

stays there. ‘I was never just Maggie’s true girlfriend… Do I ponder the thought, of why and how and who…?

This is weird for me, too, you know. It’s like, ever since I got that letter…’ He shilly-shallies. ‘Forget it about it all I don’t get why boys forget it all, and everything, and whatnot.’

‘Just say it now that you can, say now!’ I speak. ‘Ever from the time when I got that letter, things have been messed up amid us. It is not fair. You got to say everything you wanted to say, and I am the one who must rearrange the way I

think about you; I must make sense of it in my head. You blindsided me, and then you just shut me out. close me up and out like always- that what boys do- get in and back out fast, and see you cry as they runoff.

You start dating Ray again, you stop being my friend.' Said Olivia. (Oh, you want to get into his boxers too?)

In the Café- Marcel is hearing this- He exhales. I going to- well- go- eat over her.

‘Endlessly since I got your letter, I haven’t been able to stop thinking about you.’ He spoke.

What a bunch of lines- crappie-ness!

Whatever I was expecting him to say, it was not that. It was not that.

‘Ray.’

‘I know you don’t want to hear it, but just let me say what I need to say, okay?’ I nodded.

Part: 9

Say Ah!

And welt the crying… coming on… or something like that. ‘I hate that you’re with him. I hate it like you now. Said Olivia. He is not good enough for you. I am sorry baby girl it is right- what I said it is not right to keep whoring around. When you have a good guy that- well I think is madly in love with you. Then but Maggie on top- like get it right- and fugue shit out. One is all you need to feel the love!

part: 10

Rhapsodize…

Say it, but he is just not. No guy will ever be good enough for you. Least of all me.' Ray drops his head, and then suddenly he looks up at me and says, 'There was this one time, it was a couple of summers ago. We were walking home from somebody's house, as well as it was Marcel.' It was hot, around dusk. I was mad because Marcel's older brother Markus had said he had given us a ride home that was not all it was said to be, the room needs a good cleaning and fresh sheets, yet we did it on them anyway- gross.

I was dissatisfied- I hope I am not pregnant. Let us get a sandwich, and then he went somewhere and did not come back, to get my undies hanging on the door handle, so we had to walk back to Maddie's place. I was wearing hills and my feet were heartbroken like me feel oh so terrible. Ray kept telling me to keep up with him, and not be a pain in the ass baby, that he should dump, for sucking- and not fucking right. He said I will not even tight… Awah! I want Marcel right now! I need a hug, and a loving kiss, to make it feel aright- what did I do?

~*~

Vociferously he says, I call Marcel to get me as I fall behind to get away from his mouth and many hard slaps in the face. There he was in his dads-

2016 Stingray Corvette, why would I give that up too? He said- ‘It was just me and you. he had on that light blue shirt I got him, and an under top I used to wear when sleeping over with him at night and need a night top to roll in or be seen in by his mom and dad, I would have all and everything off

in his bed of cores, look at you your shown your belly button, and have your butting hanging out, can the top get and tighter?' Stop doing what he asked, he used you like Jenny.

Oh, how I loved that shirt. 'I almost kissed you that day since we have been apart from your photo on my PC. I thought about it. You and I all the time now, it was this weird impulse I had. I just want to see what it would be like that again yet put this on. And- well run!'

My heart stops. ‘And then?’ The heart-shaped ring looked like hers, ‘And then I don’t know. I guess- I forgot about it- us.’ Did you forget? I let out a sigh.

‘I’m sorry you got that letter. You were never supposed to see that. It was not meant for you to ever read. It was just for me, to say it was you to do and show.’ I loved you long before he even thought about it- okay stop fucking up- I love you!

‘Maybe it was fate. This was all supposed to materialize just like this,

because it was always going to be you and me.' I say the first thing that comes to mind. 'Nope, it wasn't.' And I comprehend it is correct. This is the moment I realize I do not love him, which I have not for a while. That I never did. Because he is right there for the pleasing: I could kiss him again; I could make him mine. But I do not want him. I want someone else. It feels strange to have spent so much time wishing for something, for someone, and then one day, suddenly, to just stop.

It all stops fast- and I look back and see all the mistakes. I run my fingers inside my jacket sleeves. ‘You can’t tell Maggie about this all. You have to promise me, Marcel.’ I said I lift her for you only. Reluctantly he nods.

And the day ends with us making up and talking it up.

‘Has Maggie been in touch with you recently?’ I ask him.

‘Yeah. She called the other night. She said she wants to hang out while she is home. She wants to go to

DC for the day. Go to the Smithsonian, get dinner in

Chinatown.' 'Great. Then that's what you'll do.' I pat him on the knee and then quickly take my hand back. 'Josh, we just have to act like before. Like always. If we do that, everything will be fine.' I repeat it to myself in my head. Everything will be fine. We will all go back to our proper places now. Maddie and the one we did want in our groups yet had to babysit Maggie.

part: 11

After School, Special…

AFTER SCHOOL LET'S OUT

THE next day, I go look for Marcel in the weight room. He is sitting on the bench press. It is better to talk here and not in his car. I am going to miss riding around in his car. It was starting to feel like home. I am going to miss being somebody is pretending girlfriend. Not just somebody's- James. I have gotten to like Danny and Gabbie and the other Lexie all the kids at the other table next to us. They are not as douchey as people say.

They are good people…

The weight room is empty except for Danny. He is at the bench press, lifting weights. When he sees me, he smiles? ‘Are you here to spot me?’ He sits up and wipes the sweat off his face with the collar of his T-shirt.

My heart squeezes painfully. ‘I’m here to break up. To fake break up, I mean.’ Dan does a double take at me want it and all. ‘Wait. What?’ ‘There’s no need to keep it going. You got what you wanted, right?

(A week before Jenny passes)

Jenny- You saved face, and so did I. I talked to Marcel, and everything is back to normal with us again. And her sister will be home soon.

So, I do not know if I get it and over beforehand, So, my mission is accomplished I will see you tonight then-, won't I? Or else.' He slowly nods. 'Yeah, I guess if that how it has to be.'

Karly- My heart is breaking even as I smile. 'So okay, then.' With a flourish, I whip our contract out of my bag, like my compact. 'Worthless and void. Both parties have hereby fulfilled

their responsibilities to each other in endlessness.' I am just rattling off lawyer words.

I am not going to cheat on her… you know that.

'You carry that around with you?'

'Of course! Killie's such a snob and creeper. She'd find it in two seconds.'

I hold up the piece of paper, poised to rip it in half, but Marcel grabs it from me.

‘Wait!

What about the ski trip?’

‘What about it?’

‘You’re still coming, right?’

Marcel- Jenny only made him envious of me.

Karly- I had not thought of that. The only reason I was going to go was for Marcel. I cannot go now. I cannot be a witness to Dan and Jenna’s reunion, I just cannot. I want them to come back from the trip mysteriously together again, and it will be like this

whole thing was just something I dreamed up.

'I'm not going to go.' Can he call her Jenna…? That is cool, I would, and my tongue would be up to my ass. Yet that boy she will do anything for and look over all the shit she hates about everything- and anything.

His eyes widen…

'Come on, her chest and lower! It is what guy just do, we know your eyes are up there, yet it is a guy thing we just do, blame the monkey theory I do not buy into if you want to be a hairy

ape that is on you! Ape- transited is harry woman- nice right? Yet- you can pound this shit to me into me in class, yet I cannot say a prayer- well fuck you!

Do not bail on me now like last night. We already signed up and gave the deposits and everything. Let us just have that be our final hurrah.' When I start to protest, Dan shakes his head. 'You're going, so take this contract back.' Dan and carefully puts it back in my bag. Why? Why is it so hard to say NO to him? Is this what it is like to be in love with somebody?

Marcel, Karly, Maddie, Killie, Olivia, Maggie, and Shy- we all say that… Jenny would fuck anybody!

True? Yep! -Slut!

Morning rays-

‘Today is beautiful □□ □□.’

The sun comes up and it is off to the rink, for practice.

(About a week later)

I finally got to do something for me and did my ice-skating tournament. Yes, I am a twirling girl! I have a short

start in white, and everything. Marcel is going to be on the stand all he can do is fall on his ass on the ice. I GET THE IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) DURING the morning announcements when they announce that our school's hosting this event, and not that Jenny is gone I can do what I want, and no one is going to stop me from this one is for me. I will do me now!!! It is at Penn State University event this weekend.

Be there!

Cheer me on!

The show, I get everything right on, churched it! I did a dibble lux and a triple seal cow, and the fast spin with my head back and leg up at the end. To Titanium piano argument I sing the cover! I wonder I am the only one that can, do this at my schools, I am good. It just like lying there taking it to me at this point it is all in my head. Before any of the guys sit down, I get a perfect score, and first.

I was the happiest girl in the world- even mom said an excellent job!

Dad you will get it! I beat out all the girls in my class!

Part: 12

Ice and Heat

Jenny asking- ‘Do you know if Marcel still does love me?’ He gives me a funny look when I walk by, I wonder why. ‘How should I know, said the girls?’ ‘I don’t know- why I can ask, can’t I? I was just wondering, JEEZ.’ ‘Why?’

‘I think maybe I’m going to go to the mail tonight, do you want to come?

This weekend is going to be the shit! I have a feeling that he’ll be there if I go to the food court.’

Karly- ‘For reals?’ - ‘Back off!’ - ‘If he is, what are you going to do with him?’ - ‘Or the better question is what are you going to do to him?’

Jenny- I have not figured that part out yet. I will go up to him and hug, kiss, and feel his junk, I will not. I just want to see how he turned out. We

can look him up online right now and I will show you he got my name there not yours. Karly- Hacker! - Sucker - Slut!

Maddie and Olivia- we both shake our heads, and look politely away from the boy drama, ha- that is why we were gay!

Karly- No! He would be cheating on me bitch! You bitch!

Maddie- Stengel the little weasel!

Olivia- Chock out the fucker! And no not that way either you both do

that enough! I want to see him with my own eyes and open.

Maddie- I want to be surprised. By- well everything.

‘Well, don’t bother asking me to go and keep you then, or to take you places anymore, if I can have it my way, you won’t have me. I am not going to waste an awhile Saturday and Sunday crying over you I got plans too. You will see when I get back what is going down.

Jenny- Okay, do not do something you regret me.

Karly- Suck it!

Coming to you-

Chapter: 131

Preparation…

(Up to the day)

Karly asking Marcel- ‘I wasn’t planning on asking you to go.’

I throw him a hinting look. Why not?’ - ‘What- now?

‘It’s just something… I want to do for us.’ - ‘So-o we can stay us, and no one can break us.’

Marcel- Let us go after this…

(Bell)

He let out a low whistle, as we were running for the door. ‘Huh?’ I need my handbag, and I have a change for when we get there.

Marcel- Let us move there are eyes on us!

Chapter: 132

Phase…

Karly’s thought- ‘My daily objective is less about goal

achievement and more about regret management.’ #- Hashtag: (Aim Low)

Lunch- where are Marcel and Karly? The girls asked.

Jenny- I do not care about her…

Jenny- We are not even broken up yet!

Maddie- Besides, you are already trying to talk to other guys. Like why do you care?

Jenny- Why? Why do you care?

Olive- does not that sound stupid to you now.

Maddie- Yes, yes it does! - ‘Dumb fucking- fools look what you could have had!’

Olivia thought- I would be hurt if I were not impressed. That was deep! And I get it, do not be so dumb and not see what you could have had. And what your end by being you, and that is selfish, condescending, and thoughtless. I would say- ‘I get that’ - a-load.

Maddie- This makes me smile.

The drama is never- ever over here a big- clit!

Chapter: 133

Clear and Blue…

(Confession)

Lily Anderson- In seventh grade, I kissed at a party. It was not a romantic kiss. It was barely anything kisses... We were playing spin the bottle, and when it was his turn, I held my breath and prayed the bottle would land on me. And it did! Long and slow- It almost landed on Nevaeh. Luck was

on my side that day, and she was mine and I got everything I hoped for.

I tried to keep my face very still and whole-hearted so I would not smile, and bump teeth yet I felt her boobs and vagina my hand went down her paints, I found out she was not wearing an underwire. And a sports bra, she and I crawled into the center, and we did this very quick, yet everyone looked at the magic moment we have with more than just a peck on the cheeks and lips even if that what happened also, and

everybody groaned, and her face was red.

And I was wet, and so was she, I was not disappointed, that night we did things that you would love to hear about; like- Eating her out, and using my Twisted Love Glass one blue and clear, on her and she did it back, as I had the small end in my other whole, that must girl call an exit only, I say no if it feels go to you. Yet is all in what you like, I did it on her and she was in love with me and that too. She came to me too, on my open lips! I was rubbing

in- between her hips, with my hands fast and then slow, until it would ago. We have nude-ie photos too… see our Polaroids! I would drink it down; I got her too also… and it was so cute to me.

She is so cute to me!

Chapter: 134

Stargaze…

Hey U.

Maggie- me back in the old- old days… my quote: ‘You get bored you eat, you get lonely you ate, that was my old life- eating out everything I could

get my hands on, to stop the pain of not having.’

Lily Anderson- I think I would expect something more than just a kiss with more weight to it. But that was it. I will get a second chance. To do it all over I would not change a thing, yet you know that already.

I have had my love… what more can I say now it is time for me to fly away.

Karly- It will make me forget about you, all of them together, and never- ever come back!

~*~

Angelina Penelope- I have dated Marcel and Karly. AS I WALK INTO SCHOOL on Monday morning, I do not see either, I go over what I am going to say.

Maybe if I ask around some… I will find out. Hey, Quela- Anna, how are you?

Have you seen so and so? Like them, I see a lot of faces in the halls as I walk past.

Hi- Emma, hey she said.

Hi- Harper, what is up she said?

Hello- Ava, high five Yō- Madison a wink and a thumbs up.

Hey-a- Noah, he smacks my ass, as I pass.

Isabella- gives me that drop-dead look! Rolling her eyes like fuck you in the ass hole! Or the other one you pick!

Bonjour- Benienie, hey!

Aiden- he looks and walks by shyly; he likes me- weird!

Jackson- cute but not my type, or Karly's either. Hey gay he where his hair and the closes that he has on is so not now.

Liam- is Liam- see for yourself, do not let me inferences you.

Scarlett- Ha- she a slut! Funny right.

Charlotte- dropped her book, thanks to Tom.

Stella- the fat girl- drinking at the water- fountain, slurping it up, ow-ha! (Those things are gross, the gay PE

teacher said to wash are pit's using those, I say no think you!)

Violet- is doing just that now!

Elsa- is running to take a piss!

Hudson- slamming a locker door.

Ezra- is getting shoved into one.

Declan- looks at me like he wants to fuck on the floor.

Acedia and James- well there about doing that now!

It is Tom, Lara, and they said no to seeing my two weirdo friends and Exes. I have not seen him since the eighth grade.

Chapter: 135

Daybreak…

Angelina- What if he does not recognize me, I look at Ray? What if he does not even remember me? Yet he is sucking on her face now and it is pissing me off. I scan the sandwich boards in the lobby, and I find his name under All-purpose Assembly. For the upcoming prom, I bet Karly and Marcel

will go together! I am not sure… but I think he has already asked her. It was all over her face, when they kissed at her locker, the day before.

The General Assembly is meeting in the auditorium. Look and you can see there are desks set up for each, they and you can do to be part of… it is so cheesy and sits girl back many years, but hell that is the point right. Next, they say get naked and have a pillow fight!!! Te- he! We delegate, and onstage there is a podium where a girl in a black suit is

making a speech, on why we should not get some after, yet that the point there too. That way the girl does not wear underwire underneath and that if you must piss you can drop and go! Got it? - Good.

See you at prom!

~*~

(Freshmen year)

Karly- I am thinking I will just slip in the back and sit and watch but there is nowhere to sit, so I just stand at the back of the room with my arms

crossed and look for Marcel. There are so many people here, and everybody is facing the front, so it is hard to tell the truth.

I was at the middle school said for some event over there and a kid in a flotilla suit turns around and looks at me and whispers, ‘Are you, Karly?’ He is holding up a folded piece of paper. ‘Um- oh- okay.’ I am not sure what a page is, and then I see a girl hustling around the room delivering notes to people.

The boy thrusts the piece of paper at me and turns back around and scribbles in his notebook. The note is addressed to me saying, I need to take him to his bus. I see all the snotty-nosed rug- rats at their tables sitting in alphabetical order, so I just start wandering around trying to find this other girl that I must button her pants and shit. I must do all the volunteer work or get kicked out, for no good reason. Other people are raising their hands, calling out names I just want to bell- runaway to the bathroom and smoke or doing something other than

this shit! Before long I am hustling too. And hunted by the voices inside me like before. From behind I see a boy's hand raised for me to pick up his note, so I hurry forward, and then he turns his head just slightly.

In addition to that- oh my freaking God- he shits- his undies, and now it is my job to clean that shit, I think not! I run my ass out of the home economics room so fast your head would spin. A few feet away from me, was the band room and I get to run and sat in there playing a random ass

trumpet and nobody even noticed. I could shave a sick up to my pussy and I do not think anyone one blink or think about anything. I do not cut as much as I did- yet this one- I just had to. I should do that…? I can blow hard!

Do I want kids?

I love them only if they were mine…

What do you say to that?

~*~

Tom- has sandy hair, clean-cut. His cheeks are rosy, just the way I

remember. They still have that fresh-scrubbed wholesomeness that makes him look young. He is wearing denim and light green and pink button-down with a white T-shirt underneath. He looks thoughtful, engrossed like he is a real delegate, and this is not pretending. Honestly, he looks just the way I imagined he would know that he that I would call all grow up to look.

I am holding the piece of paper, one being a love note passed around, out for me as he takes notes with his head down, he is shy, and it

said I hart you on it. I reached for it; my fingers close around the paper, and then he looks up and does a double take.

‘Hi,’ I whisper, flirtingly.

Maggie is the one that passed it- We are both still holding on to the note. And she gives me a shy eye also! She likes me more than he does.

‘Hi,’ she says back. She blinks, and then he lets go of the paper, and I hurry away with my eyes the teacher does not bitch, my heart pounding in my ears. From both she and he, I hear

him call out my name in a loud whisper, and then her, I do not get how I got so popper after the party last week, I just got child that all. But I do not slow down. No time to think… I look down at the paper and see more than one boy’s number and where to hook up. His handwriting is neat, precise. I go deliver his note back saying- yes.

All my afternoon and night were going to change from that day on.

~*~

Olivia’s little sister moves back from her dad's place, and is now going

to are a school, instead of where she was: Olivia- age- eleven- taller and smart, blond, and careless for now. All lags and long arms. Big hands too! I just saw Ray. After all these years of fucking on an off, I finally saw him my Ex and I do not want to I know I end up doing sad things. And he knew me, I am easy, for him. Right away he knew who I was and was all over me. you know all over me. I get a text from him around lunchtime. I have been moving back and forth between homes and the school ever since I was little, they cannot get their shit together.

Walkout into the hall, I see a boy pass- I remember everything.

Did you see Ray?

‘No-how that fuck- are you and- why do you even ask, dumb little shit!’

Okay…? Thanks…

I type back yes, but then I delete it before I hit send. Why do I do this to myself, I need back in… I write back instead, all over and say- to me. I am not sure why I did yet I get why I would not. I just want to keep it for myself and be happy knowing that he

remembered me, for me and not the fast- fucking sex, where I get bent and pounded, and have that be enough. Or my doing all the work on- top!!!

~*~

WE ALL GO TO Marcel, and he picks up Maggie from the airport. The day she moved here, and Kellie made a sign that says Welcome Home sing, we did know at this time that she would be classed as uncool or swagger-less. I keep my eyes peeled for her, and when she comes out, and I am ready to hug, I almost do not recognize her for a

second- her hair is short! It is cut in a bob! When Margot sees us, she waves and she runs to my arms and I kiss her cheek, and Kellie drops her sign and runs toward her also. Then we are all hugging, and Daddy has tears in his eyes, for she is all grown up for when he saw her last, she was in Pampers. ‘What do you think?’ Maggie says to me, good to see you love your hair now. I have not talked to you more than on the video chat.

It was an awesome day!

The day that: I fall to her!

~*~

‘It makes you look older,’ I lie, and Maggie beams a glow at me. If anything, it makes her look younger, but I knew she would not want to hear that. On the way home, she makes Daddy pull over at Clouds for a cheeseburger, even though she says she is not hungry. ‘I’ve missed this so many senses then,’ she says, but she only has a few bites and Karly has the rest.

I am excited to show Maggie all the cookies we made, but when I take

her into the dining room and show her all the tins, she frowns. ‘You guys did this for me you’re the best.’ I feel a little bit guilty, but I honestly did not think Maggie would mind. I mean, she was in Ohio, doing more fun stuff than baking cookies, and being in the city.

We saved half the dough in the freezer, though, so you can still help us bake the rest for the neighbors.’ I open the big blue tin so she can see the cookies layered, and we had to. The school ends tomorrow. If we had waited for you, we would not have had time.

All- lined up in rows. I am proud of how they are the same size and height. ‘We did some new cookies this year. Try an orange creamily; it’s really good.’ Maggie picks through the box and scowls. ‘You didn’t do molasses cookies?’ ‘Not this year… We decided to do orange creamily cookies in their place.’ She picks one up and I watch her bite into it. ‘Good, right?’

She nods…

So- do I- ‘Mm-hum.’

‘Those where Kellie’s pick.’

And also- mine…

Maggie- glances toward the living room, TV?

Sure…? We say… Maggie- Movie?

‘Okay!’ We say…

‘When did you guys do all this for me?’

‘Killie couldn’t wait,’ I say, and it sounds like an excuse, but it is true. I try not to sound self- justifying as I add, ‘I think it’ll be nice to enjoy the tree for as long as we can.’ ‘So, when did you

put it up?' Unhurriedly I say, 'A couple of weeks ago…' Why? Why- is she in such a bad mood now? 'That's so long ago.

It'll probably be dried out a little in the memories of the past.'

~*~

Maggie walks over to me and her, the moves are playing under the blanket we are that is the first time I feel that way about her. I see that my sis wants to be- in-between and somehow this feels like a fight, and we never fight. But then Maggie yawns and

says, ‘I’m sleepy. I think I’m going to take a nap.’ Aah- and I said come to my bed and I will join you! ‘Okay!’

When someone has been gone a long time, at first you save up all the things you want to tell them. Yet here in the bed I had nothing to say it wall a coming out in the touching and feeling. You try to keep track of everything in your head, yet I forget everything, even what I have for breakfast.

Nonetheless, it is like trying to hold on to a fistful of sand: all the little bits slip out of your hands, and then

you are just clutching air and grit. That is why you cannot save it all up like that. Because by the time you finally see each other, you are you are catching up only on the important things, because it is too much bother to talk about the trivial things. I want to get all said- yet Ido not do not know how to as of now. But then again, the trivial things are what make-up's life. Like a month ago when Daddy slipped on a banana peel, a literal banana peel that Kitty had dropped on the kitchen floor. Killie and I laughed forever and never- ever wanted to stop.

~*~

I should have e-mailed Jenny about it right away; I should have taken a picture of the banana peel. Now everything feels like you had to be there and oh never mind, it is not that funny.

‘If you with her you can be seen with me- she said back.’ ‘Why?’ I simply asked.

Jenny- ‘Don’t ask I don’t shit’n have to give you away!’

Maggie- read it- and said I should go back?

I said hell no- well be friends regardless of what she says.

You will be my dirty secret.

Okay… she was crying.

Chapter: 136

Spell…

Karly- Marcel, your such an ass!

Marcel- That is right I am your ass- hole!!!

Is this how people lose touch? And feel when they get back in touch? I did not think that could happen with sisters- like friends of the past. With other people, but never us. Before Maggie left, I knew what she was thinking without having to ask; I knew everything about her, it has not changed, on the way Jenny feel, friends- Not anymore forbidden. I do not know what the view looks like outside her window, but I went up to it anyways and saw the city, she still wakes up early every morning to have a real breakfast, or if now that she is at the

high school, she likes to go out late and sleep in late.

~*~

(I am a girl… just a girl… so-out of the group.)

Saniya- All I know is she likes her classes, from what I can see, I am in this with her, she not liking all the teachers' ways and how dumbed down all the crap is to do, and she has been made to do this, like us all, so basically, I know nothing.

Pammie- I think sometimes though, there is usually a helper in the class, because all the people in the class who can do the work but do not want to, they take all the teacher's time, so they cannot help other people who need it.

(Half a year)

Maggie- Here is what I say: I feel worthless… I had to write a mission statement the other day in the study hall, special education room and this gal must come in and help me, and I must think about what to write. As

well as I feel like she is staring at me all the time, this girl that is far gone I do not like this… I get my shit done in the end; I do not need your help!

In addition to I must give me some ideas as if I could not think for myself and said because this assignment was on values do you want to be a selfish person or unselfish person and I took a moment because some people have called me selfish before, and before… a few seconds she is selfish is thinking only about yourself and unselfish means thinking about

others first, and it is like duh-Uh, you think I am that retarded. They do not teach me anything I just sit and do nothing all day and think about what I am missing. It is hell…!

I personally, just feel depressed like special- Ed has ruined my life. and then during my IEP meeting the IEP director was like well what do you want to go to college for, and I was like pre-medicine or being an Rn if I must and she was saying like you know we all have dreams, but some are just not going to be possible and look at other

majors and what are you good at. It needs to end, put me whit the others so I can have a life, now and someday. Hey, I know exactly how you feel, I have been through the same situation.

Special Ed's teachers sitting beside me all the time and taking me to another room to do the work, even though I was perfectly fine doing it on my own. It is very embarrassing and humiliating. I always felt that I would learn better doing it myself, and learn to cope on my own, but none of them understood. I also felt different from

other kids, like I was from another planet or something. But anyway, in one of my Special Ed English classes.

My English teacher noticed that I could achieve better work and being in the normal classes- yet they will not let me go into them, so she rang up my parents to ask them if it was okay never- ever getting out, and then I eventually, I will never get moved into the normal classes. I become exposed for one hour!

And it backs it to the small little dumb ass room.

Maggie's- mother- So really, I just work as hard and tell them that you feel a little embarrassed being taken out of classrooms, I am sure they would understand. Tell them that you want to learn on your own and whenever you do need a bit of help, just ask someone.

Karly- do not give up! Is there any way you or your parents could suggest a move into a general education classroom for more parts of the day? Or could it be determined that you do not need that aide coming in to help you?

It must be hard if she is rushing and giving you suggestions when you are just trying to think. And about college - keep pushing for what you want! Plenty of colleges have supported all types of learners, and if you need a little extra help, you will always be able to find it.

Even so, chances are if you are motivated by pre-med, you will do fine in the classes, because you want to learn about it. So, let your other teachers, parents; and anyone else know that you want to do pre-med…

they cannot push you into something you do not want to do!

Maggie- You do not get it unless you go through it- and live it!

‘Once you are out of school you can be anything- I hear it all the time I nothing no, how the fuck- will I be anything, when I get out? And have nothing to fall back on.’

Karly’s Mom- That's rubbish does not listen to them you can be whatever you want to be in life. Do not let these people make you feel inferior, you will have to do a year extra, but

you can follow your dream. I had to attend a special education math's lesson, it was awful I felt like a fool as the weekly tests where 'there are 5 balls in this circle color 3 of the balls green and 2 balls red' I understand how you feel and no you are not stupid at all.

'I get that you like playing with balls- I can do this shit!'

Do not let the education you are getting destroy your dreams you can be everything you want to be, I am proof of that, it did take me a lot longer

to get here but I am glad I did not listen to the people who told me. ‘There is no chance on god’s green earth that you can ever do that!’

What a girl named Anna sad to me, she thinks she is smart- Welcome to the world thinking just because you are different you must be mentally retarded. I get this all the time. Not that there is anything shameful about being mentally retarded…not at all. But then again it is frustrating to be ‘dumbed down,’ no matter what your IQ is, to begin with. Know this… your life

is not ruined. We all get challenges, every one of us. As for this person telling you to forget about medicine or nursing... blow her off and go for it. If someone tells you something like this again, say, it is my right to try, yes? And so, does she… there are important things, I have not told her- how my letters got sent out.

Jessie- I hate being in Special-Ed classes!

I am enjoying High School so far but, my English and Global History class are both Special Ed. I find some of

the kids to be stupid in the classes and feel like I should not be in there. My average in English has been 91, 92, 88, and 95 so far. My average in global has been an 89 this entire year.

I want to get switched out of these classes and be with normal kids, but my parents and teachers do not seem to believe that I am capable enough. Also, it is not considered cool to be seen in Special Ed classes. It is also very embarrassing to be seen in Special Ed classes when my friends are in regular classes. Does anyone know

any way I could convince my parents, or teachers to get me out of these classes? Btw- (by the way) I am not insecure, I am just really losing my patience with my school. I just do not feel like I there, I am all locked up in a room with no one to be a friend on the outside, or in here.

Normal boy- Bob- Getting an A in a special education class is not at all the same as getting an in a regular non-special education class. (Is that say then why to be here, I ask?) Why? Why-can I be like you I can out-do you

motherfucker? You need to learn to write also and keep your mouth shut.)

If you don t understand classwork in those classes, the teacher can provide some help, (B- FUCKING – S, all they do is make you feel dumb and inferior for being you, no help is there, don’t you get that, show me what they do? For I can see it!) Nevertheless, must move on to teach the rest of the class- who DOES get the material. They cannot stay with you until you exactly understand something in your way. (This is what you get with these kids,

yet they cannot even put a coma in there texting. And their grammars are-less than that of first graders.)

Karly- You need to figure out why the authorities think you are crazy. Once you know that you can act like you are not. Maybe earn a better grade and such. Maggie- I am just a puppet on a string.

BS! THIS IS WHAT I GET! BS! ‘People who are your friends won't ever care what classes you are taking. It would be much more uncool to get held back in high school (which regular Ed

can do) while all your friends did graduate and leave you still in high school having to keep attempting classes.’

You are NOT GOING TO HAVE SHIT OR A LIFE, like who is going to hire you in your town, know you are the fucked up sped kid, retarded, dumb or not worth living life, how do you get a job when you are hated? And how do you get schooling when you had none to build upon when you drop up for getting harassed.

You do not make money with a job… you can do anything; how do you get that…?

Answer that fucker! When you took it away from me… and yes it was you not me- I not the bad girl!!!

Spell this- F! U! C! K! Y! O! U! (Both fingers up) what does that say! I can read it, can you?

~*~

Ryan- ‘I am male and 16 and I find them very patronizing and treat me as if I were Retarded. It is humiliating.

(SORRY - It depends on the teacher. There are some good ones out there and unfortunately, like life, there are some that are sour.) One of the things that I hate is being pulled out of class to do something that I am quite capable of doing on my own. I was wondering if there is a way that I can prove them wrong so that I can be like everyone else (are you demonstrating that you can do it? If they are not seeing it then they may be pulling you out to work on the skills... when my students demonstrate the skills, I am not pulling them from other classes. You may also

want to express your concern… If I must be pulled, can you, do it _____ time?')

'Maybe if you would just keep us in the mainstream class, we learn something… think about that on before you say we can get anything right or learn.'

I was wondering how to get off my IEP. It is embarrassing to be ridiculed for being in special Ed and everyone standing up for you like a retard and trying to defend you. I did not know I was in Special Ed because I

thought Special Ed was the all-day class. No! NO- it is not all day. It can be for almost any type of issue. To get off the IEP you need to test out or your parent- guardian must come in and sign out. However, before I recommend it to anyone, I would look at academic success- yes, the dreaded grades- behaviors, and participation in class. If you are getting ‘Ridiculed’ let your teacher or admin know.

You have the right to a safe and secure environment. Some people may argue that is a form of bullying.

You can always take the approach you are working in smaller groups... so-on, I wish that I can cure my disability and be normal, but no Technology is not that advanced enough. I hate having an aid it is embarrassing to me I do not want to be retarded. I also have this relay mean like head special Ed's teacher which I hate.

I would like to know how I can be normal and get out of special- Ed because I am missing some fun other classes for normal people too. I have also ridden on the short bus which was

humiliating- as well- I have an autism spectrum disorder and mental retardation may be to better understand... you should find out the disability classification and research it. They are wanting to help you find coping skills and development skills. Technology may be the thing to help compensate for the deficits that may be visual to society.

Teacher: Just drop out or deal with it!

I say: ‘FUCK YOU! DIE!’

Teacher- I am surprised your district does not allow you to have a say at your IEP annual meeting. I would speak to your parents and teachers so they could get some insight on your opinions for your goals for the year. Stand up for yourself if you feel that strongly about it. It will not get done if you do not say anything.

I say: ‘KISS MY ASS!’

Plus- saying, you should die does not mean I need help with my emotions, you sick twisted fuck!

~*~

They say- If you are in the US, your parents need to agree with you. They would need to call a new IEP meeting and request changes. You may be able to get moved into some regular classes like history, art, gym, and be in some special Ed classes like English and Math.

(Not if you are railroaded into it- sing or going to a dumb ass school or dropping out and tapping yourself on the head the rest of your days. Nut they class you!)

What the kids think all of them- ‘If you're in special Ed you probably need to be there!’

I say fuck you, you do not get it, and you would never- ever- ever- ever, last a day as me!

You would kill yourself, that is not a bad idea for you and your mouth, you do that for saying shit like that! That is what you think about me… right?

UM-hum!

Chapter: 137

Whereas…

Karly- Yes Marcel makes me orgasm over and over, you would love to feel and see what he can do to me. I was feeling how that was all belling up in my G-spot and coming out hard thick and watery. I get the milky type coming out of me with my clit being jacked about by his hands or mine, white- Sh when it is going in and out, and clear when I squirt hitting the right spot. Do not stop- do not stop we did it for three hours not stopping just coming. Until I can take another.

Maggie- That is what I thought…

The truth about me is starting to show if I like it or not. The truth about me… or so you think. Do you like me now?

Or would you hate me now?

Would you turn your back on me if you saw me?

I know you would all do!

Do you get that?

Do you…?

Do not be heartless, yet some of you will giggle and say yes, she gets what she deserves, I do not deserve this… I- we do not.

~*~

Are you just as FUCKED as me? I do not think so, normal kids… I do not think so, and getting fucked in the ass, here is not what I am saying, just so you can comprehend that one.

Karly- I wonder if Maggie feels it too. The distance between us. If she even notices. Daddy makes spaghetti Bolognese for dinner. Kitty has hers

with a big pickle and a glass of milk, which sounds terrible, but then I take a bite, and pickle and spaghetti taste good together, milk, too. Maggie is about to crack I see it all over her face, as she sits next to me. Kellie's dumping more noodles on her plate when she says, 'Liv, Jean, what are you going to get Ray for Christmas?'

I glance at Maggie, who is looking at me. 'I don't know. I hadn't thought about it.' 'Can I go with you to pick stuff it out?'

Um- not if the girls go…

Um-

Karly- ‘Sure if I get him something, more, I can do it to times.’

Maggie- ‘You have to get him something; he’s your boyfriend.’

Karly- ‘He not my boyfriend… he just a friend that is a boy that I do things with.’

Maggie- ‘I still can’t believe you’re dating Marcel.’

I- NO!

Karly- They do not say it, they think- like it is a good thing.

‘Can you just… not?’ I say anything at all.

Karly- Umm- when a girl says stop when she just had fourteen orgasm’s stop means give me on more until my legs shack my hip thrusts upwards, and my body covers- with your hands, jerking back and forth fast, it is just that right movement, girls get it. OH- away! And a girl can teach a guy how to do this, and lite it builds and heightens then it is one after another

orgasming drizzling all over me, and its worm and feels good, as it drips down my vagina into my but cracks- it- it runs in its sticky-ness. Aww-ahh-Aa! (Do you see this?)

My ass just vibrated, someone just followed me on Instagram. Do not know them yet that all right, they love me, and I get that. I do not always back yet that what a popular girl does.

~*~

Maggie- ‘I’m sorry, I just don’t like the people that take shit about me.’

Madilyn- I pass the field, and I see the band at practices, and they are playing ‘We Are Young!’

(One week before the crash)

‘Well, you don’t have to like him. I do,’ I say, and Marcel shrugs. I think you should be with me and not him.

I asked- Why?

Why? If you do not get then never- mind- go!

~*~

Chapter: 138

Break…

(The first week of me dating a girl)

Karly- Daddy stands up and claps his hands together. ‘We have three different kinds of ice- cream for dessert! Pralines and cream, Chunky Monkey, and strawberry. All your favorites, I said to her, you remembered- she said. We were at this little train station that is converted into an ice- cream stand. Sitting out under the lights, late on a school night.

Maggie looks out the window of the taxi, toward the house. ‘Josh wants to see me later. I hope he finally gets that we are broken up and he does not try to come over every day while I am home. He needs to move on.’ What a mean thing to say.

She is the one who has been calling Josh, not the other way around. ‘He hasn’t been yearning for you if that’s what you’re imagining,’

I speak. ‘He gets that it’s over it and me too.’

Maggie stares at me in surprise, like this was some shocker. ‘Well, I hope that’s true.’ ‘I THINK WE SHOULD do a recital party this year,’ Maggie says from her spot on the couch.

(Christmas 0-12)

Maggie- People would drift in and out of the piano room and sing along, and Maggie and I would take turns playing. When my mom was alive, every Christmas we would have what she called a recital party. She would make tons of food and invite people

over one night in December, and Margot and I would wear like dresses and play Christmas Carols on the piano all night long. I hated piano recitals because I was the worst in my age group and Maggie was the best.

Kellie- It was humiliating to have to play some easy 'Für Elise, and reindeer' while the other kids had already moved on, I was banging the piano. I always hated recital party where you can drink or drug it up, old fart shit. I used to beg and beg not to have to play. (Now I miss those days.)

Last Christmas, Mommy bought us matching red velvet dresses to wear, and I threw a fit and said I did not want to wear it, even though I did, even though I loved it. I just did not want to have to play the piano in it next to Margot. I screamed at her, and I ran to my room and smashed the door, and I would not come out. Mommy came up and tried to get me to open the door, but I would not, and she did not come back.

People started homeward bound, and Maggie started playing the

piano, and I stayed upstairs. I sat in my apartment room, lousy and philosophy about all the dips and little canapés Mommy and Daddy had made, and how there would be none left for me, and how Mommy did not even want me down there anyway after the way I would behave.

Maggie- After Mommy died, we never had another recital party.

Kellie- ‘Are you serious?’ I asked her.

Karly- ‘Why not?’

Maggie shrugs her shoulders to the side- then up and down, rolling from one side to the other side. ‘It’ll be fun. I’ll plan it all, you won’t have to do anything.’

Karly- ‘You know I hate the piano.’ Stay with me is something I have been working on hears this and be nice.

‘Then I play the whole thing.’

Kellie looking at me like- what the shit- was that?

Maggie’s worried eyes looked at me for she knew how it was for. Biting her lip, she offers, ‘I’ll do, before I left her for him again. ‘Moves time? - Lost in New York?’

Alone at home, funny!

I like it when he gets fired, like in 101 when his balls do.

Maggie reaches out and cuddles me with her hug and hands, and says, ‘that’s a great idea. I’ll play the piano and you’ll do tea or coffee- no can do, Olivia, and I will just- be a’

‘Watching,’ I finish, Jen won’t be here if Maggie is.

Going out with the girls… nice fancy place and crap!

‘I was going to say entertainer but suit yourself.’

I do not answer her, she was not worth it to me nob, ass bitch!

We eat.

We dace-

Maddie farts… and yah-

You get it.

I pass it out my mouth nonetheless, loudly.

That is the point to make sense.

Karly- I remember the start of my freshmen year with Maggie after the day of her coming back to me, she, and I both got our clits piercing matching on our first date. (Do you want to see? She unbuttons her jeans and pulls down the undies gummies-band at the top with her thumb exposing her jewelry going through her clitoris.) we were around fourteen at

the time… fake ID is and having an older girl to get you into the tattoo shop. The guy doing was more than happy to pier our fourteen-year-old clits. Look at that face! (I wonder what went through Marcel’s mind the first time he saw that?)

It was not long ‘till I feel and saw what he thought!

Yes, you know it thinks about that going back and forth un and down with these oral movants. The sensitive is instant cummie’s, in his face and

mouth!!! And yes, I am a squatter that shoots it far!!! You like that! do not lie!

UM-HUM That is what they all say!

Ant I cute?

There too right…? why do you think I got this? It holds the hood skin back a good bit, which I heated with a passion for myself. You get that… don’t you?

Maggie was reluctant at first with the idea, yet afterward, what more than pleased with what it could do for

her and I. even she said, I am not that type of girl. What type of girl are you to do something pleasurable, thrilling, and stimulating for you and your lover? Think about how hard you are coming and going to just freaking going to gush-h!

‘Um-? Okay-? If you say so- for you!’

It is something that we shared that no one ever knew about…

-Until the day I died, and it was all showing, and Maggie’s Dr. said Hey I see that one before. And she told her

boyfriend, and it got around. Everyone was shocked shitless, nonetheless, yet happy for her… for have balls, which they never saw, that I gave to her.

~*~

Later, we are watching TV, and Kitty is asleep, curled up on the couch like she is a real cat.

Margot wants to wake her up and make her go to her bed, but I say just let her sleep, and I put a quilt over her. ‘Will you help me work on Daddy about a puppy for Christmas?’ I ask. Maggie groans. ‘Puppies are so much

work. You must let them out to pee like a million times a day. As well as they shed like cracked. You will never be able to wear black pants again.

Also- who is going to walk it, and feed it, and take care of it?' 'Kellie will. And I'll help.' 'Kellie is so not ready for the responsibility.' Her eyes say, and neither are you. 'Kellie's matured a lot since you've been gone.' And so, have I… 'Did you know that she packs her lunch now? And she helps with the laundry? I do not have to nag her to do her homework, either. She

just does it on her own- on her own like always.' 'Really?

Then I'm impressed.' Why can't she just say, excellent job, oh and Liv and Jean?

Thanks for not showing… when I did my shows, that is it.

Maggie- If she could just acknowledge that I have been doing my part to keep the family going since she has been gone, her my real mom. But no. Hell no I am moving in with Karly I said to her- 'fine go!' she yelled…

Chapter: 139

Replica…

Maggie- The high school ranking never- ever die unless, even if your out- that is if you are on Facebook, for the group are never die-off on there, do you see it like stupid high school games, for who does this and that, and I do not care to see. Even if you want to change their mind, you are not your status to them never well change its all in their made-up minds not too.

-Did you see Madilyn she changed her hair to more of a reddish

color! She looks so good! Said Oliva. I like this color to change this time. Yet, that here change her colors all the time. Black tanks with low armholes in down to her butt spending time together short shorts frayed hanggie's things on them, and today look form now on you can see her tummy and back, bra showing on the side, brighter read ends on her locks, waved out, and dark burgundy on the top, new gray-blue contacts, and big long lashes, black eyebrows, cat eyeliner, pale makeup, soft pink lips that she said matched the other set of hers, emo yet

sweet. You can look cute and be in the dress code, so fuck it she said by doing her hair and the skimpy top and bra showing along with her butt cheeks in the back.

I get a kick out of Killie stiffing her bras to look full and wearing my dress, top, and so on, she looks like a little lady. With her honey-brown hair, and short yet all their flirty look, she has a nicer ass than me. and like us she knows that if you have blue eyes, you get laid, so I see her doing that when she wants to be more like us, my dad

does not like it, he wants to keep her a little girl.

I get that he lost me too to this look and slutty act that boys want. I see her some time going braless and having one strap down on her dress just to turn them on, the boy just thinks she is small, and small chested, I swear to you she passes as one of the high schoolers. I see Kellie's wrights on her hands saying, about love or what she thinks it is, and some days to big nerdy glasses, that I cannot stand, yet I glad she where or she looks to erasable to all of

them, that want it and all of her- young, and these boys like um- young like her and tight.

This is coming from the girl that is not so any longer, yet I am not Jenny that is gapped like the grand. I worked in if you want to call it that, like a good pair of shows, and you want to wear them all the time for they feel tremendous. Exactly right so Marcel says… Okay… if you say so…? He the one that opened me up and in so many ways that is one of them. I come so much I lose a jean size as I wear to yah,

I need to eat something, God I am crapping up- shit.

~*~

‘All a boy should do when a girl is horny on top, pushing it down- when she legs side to side… all in… and sliding- kneeling- why, yet somewhat sitting- like into it, lay there and take it, forget this… they’re not moving much, that just to shut you up, but again- girl, that’s all you have to do when he is on top of you, with your head in his chest going deep.’

Its SIX THIRTY IN THE morning the day of the ski trip, Daddy drops me off at school. It is not even light out yet. It seems like every day the sun takes longer and longer to come up. Before I hop out of the car, my dad pulls a hat out of his coat pocket. It is light pink yarn with a pom-pom on top. He fits it on my head, so it covers my ears. ‘I found this in the hall closet. It was one of your mom’s. She was such a great skier.’ ‘I know. I remember.’ ‘Promise me you’ll go out on the slopes at least once.’

‘I promise…’

‘I’m so glad you’re doing this. It’s good for you to try new things.’ I smile weakly. If he only knew what went down on the ski trip, he would not be so gladdened. Then I spot Marcel and his friends messing around outside by the charter bus.

‘Thanks for the ride, Daddy. See you tomorrow night.’ I give him a peck on the cheek and grab my duffel bag. ‘Zip up your coat,’ he calls out as I shut the car door. I zip up my coat and watch his car drive off. Across the

parking lot, Marcel's talking to Killie… (wah-wah-Awah-wawa-aha)

Ray says something that makes her laugh. Then he sees me and gestures at me to come over. She walks away, looking down at her clipboard. When I get there, he takes my duffel bag off my shoulder and puts it next to his. 'I'll put this on the bus.'

'It's freezing look at this go there small yet pointy,' I say, my teeth chattering. Marcel pulls me in front of him and puts his arms around me. 'I'll keep you warm.' I look up at him like so

cheesy, but his attention is somewhere else.

He is watching Karly. He snuggles against my neck, and I squirm away from him.

‘What’s with you?’ he asks.

‘Nothing,’ I say what…

Ms. Tibbitt and Coach White are looking through kids’ bags- she is doing the girls and Coach White is doing the boys. ‘What are they looking for?’ I ask Marcel.

‘Alcohol.’

I whip out my phone and text Ray. Do not bring alcohol wink- and if you do find a place to hide it! They are checking! Nope- no response. Are you awake?

Wake up! I say!!! But then her mom’s SUV pulls into one bays of the lot and her blunders and stumbles out of the passenger seat. She looks like she just woke up.

What a release! Marcel can talk to me all he wants; I will be sharing a seat with Ray and eating the snacks I packed. I have strawberry

gummies and the wasabi peas that Ray loves, and Pickie sticks.

Marcel groans. ‘Ray is coming- so he is coming for you, why do you need me to come then?’ I ignore him and wave at her- the girl crush. Karly standing by the bus with her clipboard when she spots me too. She has a big frown on her face. She marches right up to me and says, ‘You didn’t sign up… why?’

It is not my thing…? I said unenthusiastically.

‘Come on- I- do- things for you!’ She said timidly…

Maggie- Karly give me a full makeover and now she is a cute rock looking girl looking like a younger Avril Lavigne, also the day I got her ring, she mine. Even snapping her top teeth into fang- points, colors in her hair.

Karly- that is right- I broke her glasses and did her hair and make-up and said keep it this way and you will look so hot to me. Eyes smoky, nails painted, and hair color changed. Eyebrows plucked, and new undies that

were mine. Brown hair to blonde, what a change it just works. Dissension lashes, blue contacts, and extreme extensions do so much- LIKE OMG! Do you see her- now!

‘I am a conundrum wrapped in a rattle’ That is how I would say it.

I want my Lizzy doll again, stupid- ‘!>this girl here<!’ Fingers pointing at all me they do not need to I do it to myself, yep all me this one. Um, hum- knee rubbing and award movants needed. Please… do not look at me… um God- shit!

Chapter: 140

Bygone Preceding…

(1943)

The train pulls into the Clearfield station, and the steam was rushing around my face. The moment has arrived, the moment I was so long for… hoping she would make it over, and that I would get away with this one, I knew if some find up, I will end up over there or shot in the face with no mercy. This how she got her name- the hope for this little girl’s life.

He is handsome, man that walks up to me, a lawyer or judge for the county, the last name black, the mothers were- only seventeen over in France, yet was Jewish, the mother ran… the boxcar holding her to her beast, she sees the engineer and said please take her as yours on this trip back. Overall, the rails, passed the Gestapo and or Nazi past Germany dripping in blood drip- drip covering the lands.

~*~

So my predicament, is an abuse of my Right to Have Rights, could have turned out far worse than in WW2, however, looking at history, and me being Polish as well, this was the same predicament that all Polish people faced, in appeasement, and so I think Polish Jewish people in WW2 had a far harder time mentally than people from other countries, both experiencing the same rights abuses, but Polish people where mentally abused as well, and not only by the Nazis but also by the English and Americans, which whenever some people disagree with

me that I say that I remember perfectly that I was not born there, psychiatrists say.

‘You're not Polish- then what have I said to myself one dad -Digging for answers, you're just psychologically abused, We're doing that,’ which is not true, and the 'right to have a right' is not the same thing as 'having rights questioned' which the latter is just rights abuse period, but when someone promises rights to me and then abandons me when it matters, then that is not them questioning my rights at all,

it is a Nazi form of teasing! I was undoubtedly born in here in us… so-o why do you care now what the fuck happens to those that had it coming, it never did- they say.

NO.

The Holocaust was the worst human rights atrocity, but what was happening to me in Canada in the ‘90s wasn't as bad but had the potential to be far worse because: what was happening was that people were talking to me about my rights issues in private like on a podium, pretending that

others were involved in a private discussion, and then the people who were talking to me that way abandoned me when other people were around.

~*~

I remember the trains and talk of the communist party - I never saw anything but trains. Do you see it? The term, ‘holocaust’ can mean anything. According to dictionary.com, a holocaust is ‘great or complete devastation especially destruction by fire.’ You may have heard the term

‘nuclear holocaust’ thrown around; this definition would apply to that term.

So- I am half Jewish do you heat me for it now that you know me?

This is all I paid attention to in school for it applied to me.

Do you see it…?

~*~

‘There are several books and films dedicated to this horrendous event in history I have them all I think; it would take me hours to explain it all. I was privileged to go there in my-

freshman year of high school; our docent was a Holocaust survivor and he told us about what went on in the concentration camps.'

'The Jewish Holocaust during WW2 is sometimes known as 'Shoah' began in the late 1930s. The Wannsee Conference was held to bring together the 'Final Solution,' which was to get rid of Jewry finally. Adolf Hitler, the German dictator of Germany, was an anti-Semite.

(Meaning ALL were hated.)

As well as required to get rid of Jews for the motive, that he felt that they were Communalists, betrayed Germany during WWI, and a lot of other injudicious causes.

He and his Nazi party prearranged a revolutionary group known as the SS (the Schutzstaffel) to round up the Jews, put them into ghettos, and then camps.' The first Nazi ghettos were never intended to be more than temporary, an interim concentration of Jews pending a decision concerning what the 'Final.

A solution of the Jewish Question' was going to be. That decision went through many convoluted changes before its ultimate determination.

Ghettos- The ghetto was not a Nazi invention. Its origins can be traced back to medieval times when restrictions on the places where Jews were allowed to reside were commonplace throughout Europe. Although this restriction is usually perceived as relating to towns or cities, it even applied in certain cases to

entire countries. The policy towards the incarcerated Jews also changed, as the realization dawned on the Germans that a locked-up labor force could be placed to better use than sweeping snow, or breaking rocks.

Later, the ghettos served as convenient points at which to concentrate that Jewish labor force before its liquidation. Not every town had a ghetto. Hundreds of ghettos were established in Nazi-occupied Europe, ranging in size from the 445,100 inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto to

those containing just a few families in rural quasi- ghettos. And I think being sex slaves for them also… think about it was easy butt and puss- puss!

I can see this girl, being held down agent her will, do not you, and just getting fuck hard well there was a gun at her hand, well he said f*ck me or die, and if you die, I f*ck you anyway.

So, she does what he said, and he pops her in the had he walks away, as they come is dripping down her dead body. I should know she was one of my past grandmothers. Do you see her

being shot doing without him blinking I can, do you? And then moves over to the seven-yard and does the same, she is nude and calls for her now-dead mother, yet his dick in her vagina and she gets pop and popped, do you get it. I can see her… now… do you… like an angel to me- with dark hair and soft skin, and blue eyes, small looking just like me at her age, that she is and the is seven.

The official name is, Kaiser-Richter Schűlz!

This makes my skin crawl!!!

(I wonder why- I was heated- like her… that is why?)

Why?

Is there a why? Or a reason for it…?

He cries and had the never to ask my grandparents forgiveness that was not slatted off by him, and he got it- yet I not giving it.

(Back to the story)

Men with guns, and death in the air. Plans in the air and steering to their death. Pass and clear pass all the

inspectors, we did- I said in relief, as I was sweating hard over having a smuggled baby on my lap, that was odd to have in the front parts of a locomotive, it over getting out to change the tracks, I was not happy about leaving her with others, yet I have no choice but to do so. Overall, the trains, mountains, and tunnel are the horn blowing hauntingly in my mind as we got closer to home.

I knew my wife would be thrilled, for she could not have children of her own, you see… she wanted a

baby girl, and one was just handed over to me I love her as my own. It is my secret, not even she well really knows the truth, or the baby that is my wish to have it that way, understand me! Passing time-worn tree, and faces, uniforms and girls not realizing what is going on over there, SS officer- (was it him- did he let her go out of remorse? I sure he knew… her- he looked right into her little chubby face.)

'Where this train going Mr. Ansley'- he said to me. 'I don't think that is any over your business!' And he

had he his pistol drew ready to pull, as I released the handbrake, and the wheels spun as they do fast and the chugging- building up speed, as I kicked him out the opening doorway, on to the now moving tracks.

The firefighter was on my side think God, saying babies do not need to be killed, he had the coal shovel rad hot ready to fight for her life also. There- I see it approaching me the green station, my wife wearing for me not know if I am coming back to her, and yet look what I must bring- to her along

with me. I take up to three weeks for a later to get to her, which is a lot of worry time, is it not?

Ansley- I ran the troop train poor buggers, some of you might not make it back, I do not want to look as I pull forward all young like seventeen, and they wave to me, getting in the cars. This is what he did- driving his train that I see every day in the sky tracks. -I Push the reverser Johnson bar forward - grip the exceptionally large lever that rises from near the floor in front or beside you, squeeze the release

handle and shove it all the way forward, and let go of the release handle to lock it into place. Open the cylinder cocks - find a medium size valve in front of you on the boiler, or a thin lever on the floor in front of you.

Turn the valve all the way clockwise or pull the lever back. Turn the front headlight on - above you on the ceiling, there will be a large, flat, half-round box or on the side of the cab wall. Slide the knob on the round side of the box to the front. Blow the about-to-move-forward whistle along with two

shorts and a long - there will be either a cable, cables, or whistle handle, above your head or in front of you on the boiler. Pull down on the cable (or turn the lever) twice to make the steam whistle sound out two short blasts.

Release the engine brakes - two brass horizontal levers will be near your left hand. The top one must be moved from right to left to release the brakes on the engine. Open the throttle to start the engine moving - the exceptionally long lever in front of your

face is the throttle. Grip it firmly and give it a yank toward you.

As you feel the engine moves slightly, shove it back in most of the way so that it does not gather speed too fast. Gradually open throttle as the locomotive approaches track speed. Observe cylinder cock exhaust and close them when only steam is emitted. Move the Johnson bar slowly back toward vertical, but never too close to vertical.

This is like the gear shift of your car and admits less steam per

cylinder stroke. In turn, this increases the efficiency of steam usage, so you do not overwork the poor guy throwing coal into the fire (and to conserve fuel and water!) If the locomotive's wheels slip, close throttle most of the way immediately. Allowing the wheels to slip will not render any tractive effort and will damage the locomotive if done continuously (also ‘tears’ holes in a coal-fired locomotive, or an oil-burning locomotive, can cause hollow booms much like an explosion.)

Blow the whistle and ring bell at all crossings of all types and DO NOT EXCEED TRACK SPEED. That is extremely dangerous.

~*~

The flagman hands her to me, as I step on the train, and the next engineer takes over for my 18 hours off the rails, no- does come in handy along with coffee, do not want to sleep. Her- the new baby was stolen from sure death at the camps. Jewish- surely, destiny for the death pits or gas shower rooms or fireboxes at Auschwitz the

death camps, I can see the nude body run around for them now, shaving head, injection in the eyes, and more for the perfect race.

All blue eyes in what they wanted, she babies Hope- and the photos of the past in black and white. She was saved from, her real family that was killed off, we are no; hitherto she never did, she never had any US paperwork. She was adopted, illegally and her new dad worked for the Pennsylvania railroad, she went over that burgh too like I, did, on the same

engine that is sitting there rusting away. In the same car that I did things in… it is so weird to me. The story keeps going on…

My wife happy yet not content, yet I loved her like my own… I hope she knows that when I left her for my job.

(Freshmen year)

Mailbox- 'Working on my fantasy of what I SHOULD have said to that, FedEx girl who gave me attitude.' Yah- so suck my pussy! I thought and then stop in my walking- God I am not that gay!

Tv- ‘So that Stouffer Mac & Cheese and is saying ‘Buy our product to make your annoying daughter shut the hell up for 2 seconds!’ God! AH! #-hashtag- (Family)

‘Our- rooms are never clean- anyways- so- why to bother cleaning it, my mom is always bitching about it anyway. So- why- bother, even- if it’s clear to me.’

‘Don’t worry about me. I’m covered.’

We showered together and did all things like that, together also, never apart.

When I give her a dubious look, she whispers back, ‘Shampoo bottle filled with tequila at the bottom of my bag.’ ‘I hope you washed it out well! You could get sick! If you go outside and make snow angels or take to people that are not there again.’

‘When is that terrified- of- everyone- I- don't- know feeling going to go away?’

I bob my head up and down and try to look enthusiastic, even though a little, pinching feeling of guilt starts nipping at yours truly. I have not even thought about the evaluations since this pre-launch, not since I found out the results would be discounted. ‘Yeah, you’re right.’ ‘Come on, now. Dinnertime.’ My aunt reaches out and passes a finger over my forehead. Her finger is cool and reassuring and gone as quickly as the lightest stirring of wind. It makes the guilt flare up full force, and at that moment I cannot

believe, I was even considering going to Back and Gold Cove.

Me after I cook anything at all- ‘I'm the best person in the world!’

I am fat- ‘Bitches got to eat, okay?’ *I* ‘Serious question: How much are wedding cakes…? And how weird would it be… like- if I wanted to buy one just to eat? By myself…?’

~*~

‘They say you shouldn't meet your heroes. And they're right because

I met a baby raccoon once and it pooped on my shoulder.’

I look at me- and the showdown in the black show is all, the girl looks happy you see the showdown deep, of secrets, isolated and inappropriate with herself and her world. I always look so said just like me, not acting it all out.

Boy’s- ‘Yes, of course, I got your text - I'm just ignoring it. Don't make it weird.’

~*~

Facebook- Twitter- ‘Does anyone else think ‘don't be a weirdo, don't be a weirdo - over and over when entering social gatherings? Cause I do not. You're probably right.’ * -- * ‘You're wrong, just don't want to seem like a dick about it.’